THE MAGAZINE OF ROMANTIC FICTION

CAMEO

OCTOBER
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FEATURING TWO COMPLETE NOVELS

LACE FOR MILADY

PRISCILLA'S RECKLESS ENCOUNTERS WITH THE CUNNING DUKE LEAD HER STRAIGHT INTO THE ARMS OF A SPY

THE IRON GATES

COULD KATHERINE'S LOVE FREE LAWRENCE FROM HIS TORTURED PAST?

PLUS SHORT STORIES AND FEATURES INCLUDING:

MAGIC MIGHT HAPPEN

AND

A GIFT OF LOVE: PRINNY'S FOLLY

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JOAN SMITH
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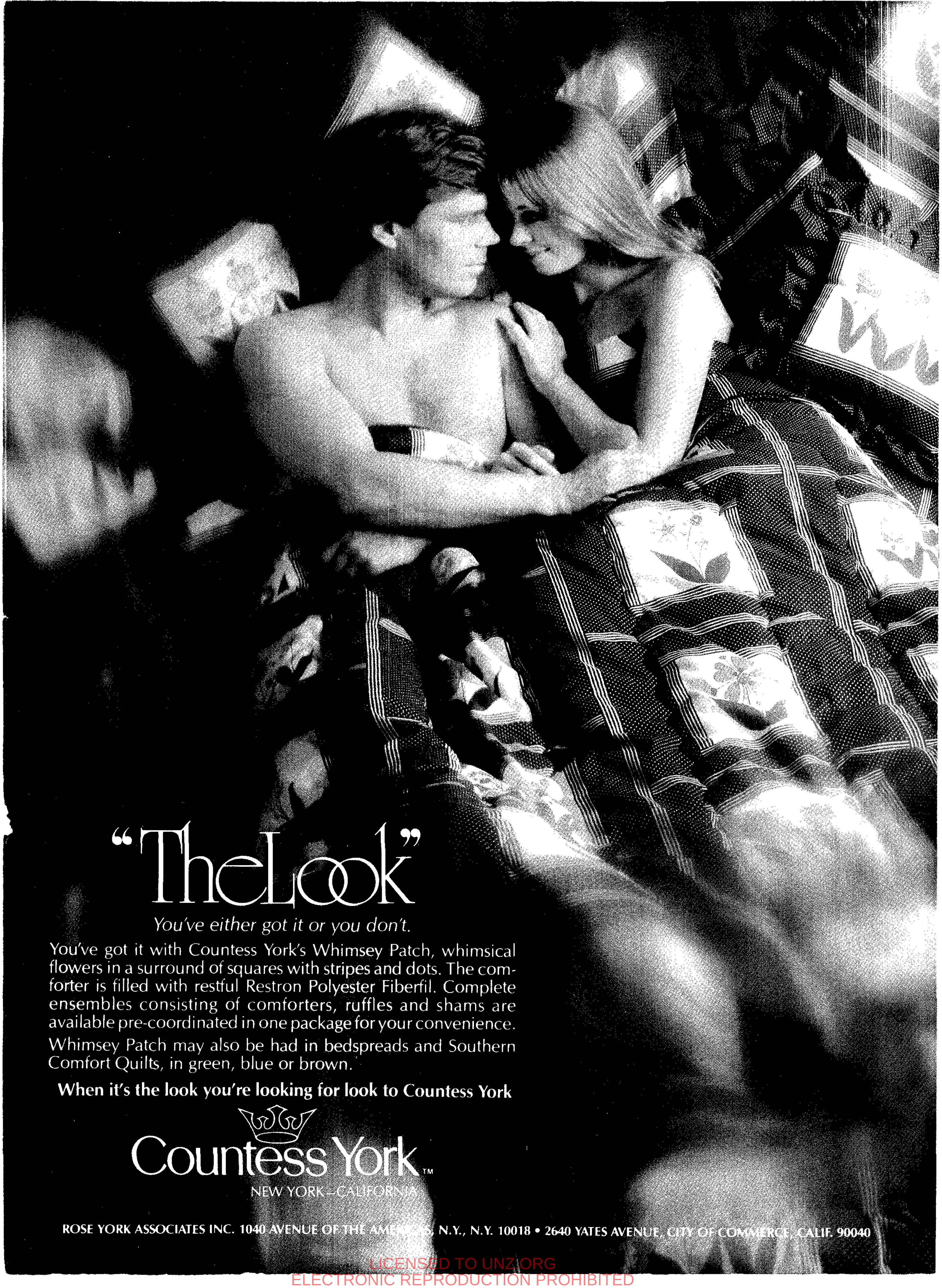

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CAMEO
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October 1980

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A Letter from the Editor

'Tis the season for Trick or Treat, Witches and Broomsticks, Ghosts and Goblins, all of which remind us of the Gothic Novel. Have you ever thought about the terrifying ingredients that make the "classic" Gothic Novel a Halloween Witch's dream?

No? Well, hang onto that broom, Witch—here they are: Ancient, lonely, ruinous castles or abbeys with dark corridors, forbidden chambers, the clank of rattling chains in the night and the lurking figures of spying servants. Scenic settings include howling gales, wild torrents, dense forests, desolate moors, moldering chapels and yawning sepulchers; a murderous villain who keeps the high-minded, modest, staggeringly beautiful heroine on the brink of death; a hero, who, common sense dictates, must be exhausted by his fevered, in-the-nick-of-time attempts to rescue her.

Even though Halloween is coming, we really wouldn't want to promise you all that. But in the spirit of bowing a bit to tradition, we do offer you Kay Stephens's The Iron Gates, superstitiously falling on page 13. This is a novel, designed not to chill the marrow of your spine but to keep you in pleasurable suspense as you watch its heroine, Katherine, struggle with her dilemma.

So for this month, enjoy a pumpkin, a goblin or two and

Happy Reading,

Manon Tingue

Manon Tingue
Editor

Cover Illustration by
Franco Accornero

Priscilla Denver and the iron Duke of Clavering walking in the Duke's "trap-infested" woods with Priscilla's mettlesome horse in the background, from the novel . . . *Lace for Milady*

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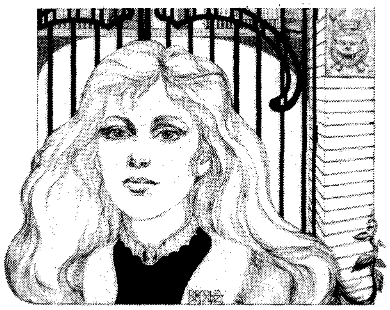

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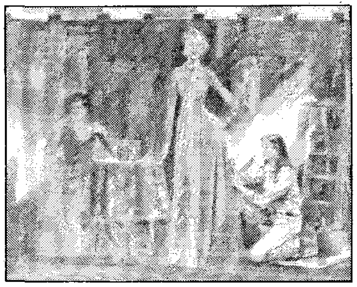

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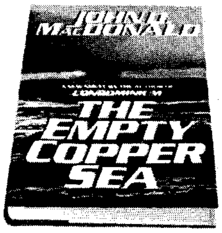

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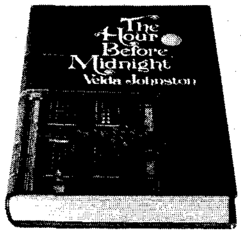

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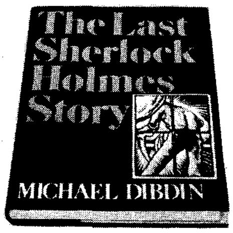

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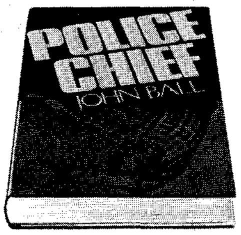

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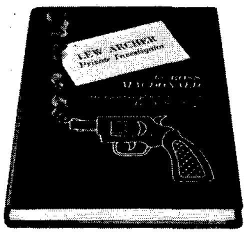

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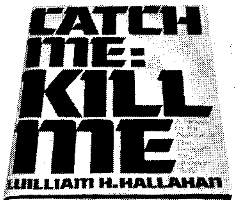

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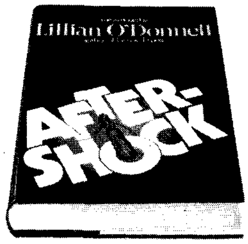

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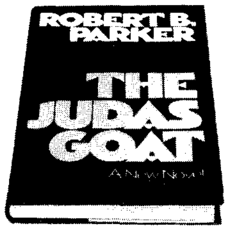

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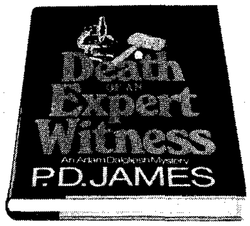

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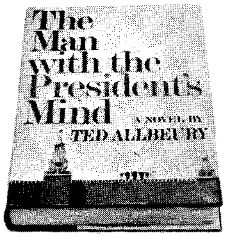

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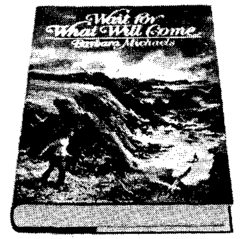

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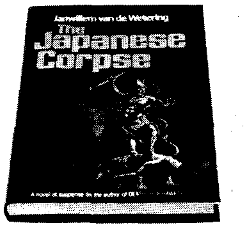

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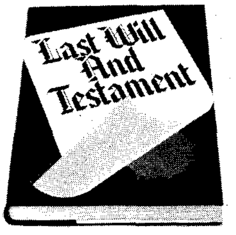

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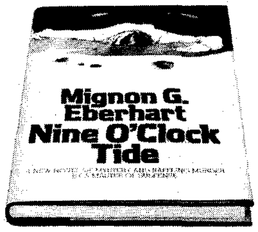

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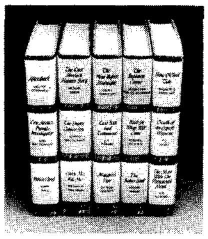

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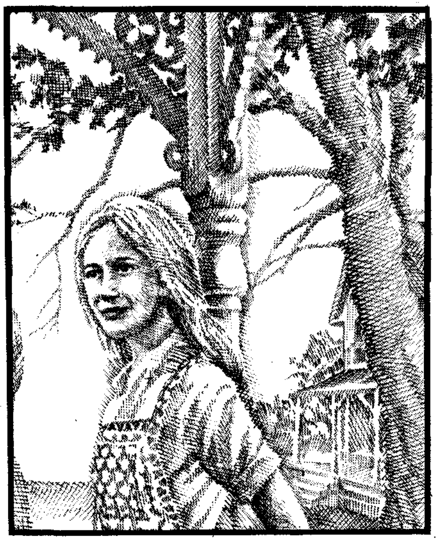
THE HOUSE THAT TIME FORGOT



In softly faded ink were Annie's words: "When love is lost, all else is lost"

Jim glanced across at me, his thick dark hair and lean face flecked with paint splatters, and grinned. "Looks pretty good, doesn't it?"

I ran the brush along the unpainted side of the intricately carved library window, wiped the hairs now covered with cream paint on the edge of the can, and stood up to view the room. The former dinginess was gone now, the tiny flower-patterned rose wallpaper with its maroon border extending a foot beneath the ceiling molding and the clean new paint making the ninety-odd years since the house was built seem almost to disappear.

I pushed back an escaping strand of hair that Jim insists on calling copper. "Darling, believe me, I never realized how big an eleven-room house can be, especially with these high ceilings. But it does look nice."

"Lisa, my lovely romantic, don't forget we've still got the outside to deal with."

"Yes, but thank goodness I met Mrs. Hobson. You know, those old photos she has of this place are going to be a big help in restoring the outside properly."

"I just hope I live to see the finished product," Jim said and groaned in mock agony.

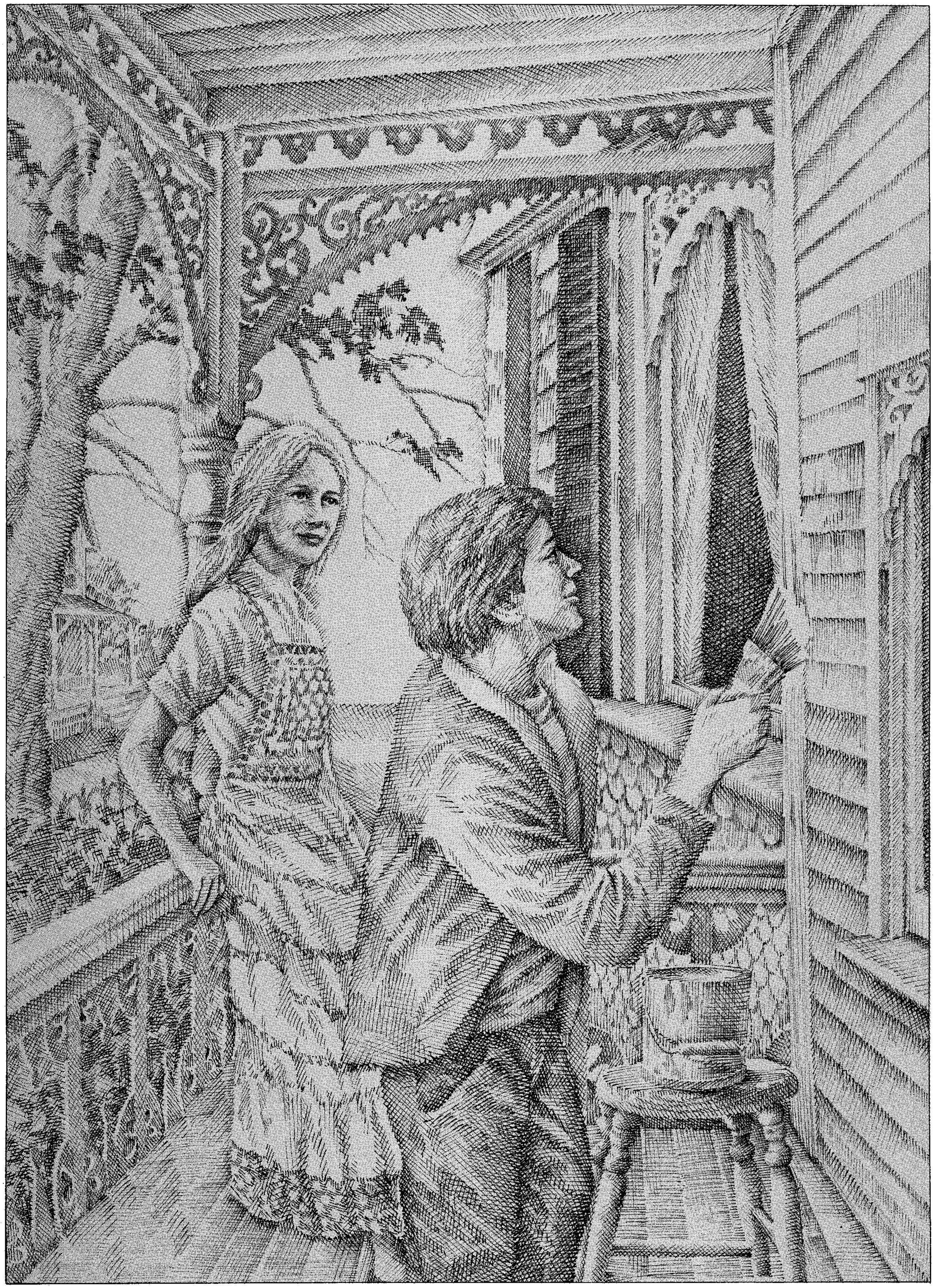
"Well, you'd better plan on living at least through tonight. I told Mrs. Hobson we'd be over about eight."

A short story by Valerie J. Naso

I turned to look out the tall windows and across the wide lawn to the spreading trees and gabled old houses across the street. Except for the power lines and the paved two-lane road it looked almost exactly as it must have nearly a century ago. What long-ago woman might have stood at this very window and seen much of what I saw now? "I'd love to know what the original owners were really like," I murmured, half to myself.

"Well, that was a long time ago," Jim said, feeling his hair for bits of paint and plaster, "and right now we'd both better think about getting at least slightly presentable if we're going to visit Nevada City society."

I soaked in a warm bath in the big claw-foot tub and thought about what had brought us to this house two months earlier. It was on one of our weekend escapes from San Francisco, our search—mine mostly—for a place where the present had not yet destroyed the past. Wishful thinking, Jim used to call it, but only half-jokingly. We both liked the city. Jim is an artist and had his own studio off our apartment in North Beach, while I worked at the Design Gallery and did some interior decorating. But still there was that need, that search for something more. On that weekend we drove north to the Gold Rush town of Nevada City, just wandering the backroads of places essentially unchanged by time, and we found our house.



Illustrated by Allen Davis

It was one of those narrow old streets common to California frontier towns, the houses solid and genteel, built the way people used to build then—with time and care and craftsmanship. The gabled windows, fish-scale shingles, and scrollwork ornamentation were from another century, a more peaceful and unhurried way of life. And halfway down the block, on the left, was a large old house, a veranda running across the front and around the sides, the remains of a drive curving through the overgrown yard. The windows gaped darkly from the peeling white exterior, and the "For Sale" sign nailed across one of the front porch columns had an air of finality, a life finished.

For us it had been a beginning. In a week Jim and I had bought "the old Summers place," as the realtor called it, and started work on making it breathe again. The interior was in surprisingly good condition, the hardwood floors glowing with the soft lustre of the years. The real work came with steaming off the old wallpaper to make way for my carefully chosen Victorian reproductions. It was strange to see the decades and, finally, a century mark—1900—unfold before us in long-forgotten colors and patterns, some seeming garish to our eyes while some—the older ones—were of remarkable beauty under the layers of dust.

We teased each other searching for pouches of gold dust or hundred-dollar bills that might have been walled up with the passing years, but what we found was much more poignant: a small book, rather like a diary, covered in faded blue silk and embroidered with tiny pink roses. It was no more than four inches in height and stuffed into a chink in the east bedroom wall. The first time I opened it my hands trembled in anticipation. It was not a written record of a life lived long ago but contained fragments of verse, some seeming to be torn from the very heart of the writer. These ended abruptly, not half filling the fine yellowed pages, the final entry being very brief. In a softly curving hand, the ink faded to a dull brown, it read:

> *When love is lost,*
> *all else is lost.*

Beneath this was a flower pressed from some long-gone spring garden and faded now so that not a trace of the original color remained. Indeed, it was as brown as the ink. At the bottom of the page was written, "Annie Summers, June 7, 1882."

That cry of pain from the past touched me deeply. I put Annie's book in the top drawer of my small jewel box, looking at it every so often and wondering about the girl—for somehow I pictured her as quite young in 1882—and the cause of her heartache.

Now much of our work was finished; the huge living room, parlor, library, and upstairs bedrooms shone once more. We could quit camping from room to room and actually begin to live in our house.

I dressed in a long peasant skirt and soft blouse; Jim, I knew, would wear Levi's and his blue flannel shirt. When we were ready we went downstairs to fix a quick supper.

Jim and I ate in the comfortable square kitchen that overlooked the back garden: hamburgers and potato salad at the oak table facing the large uncurtained south window, sitting so we could see the blossoms on the vine hanging over the back porch.

"Might as well walk over to Mrs. Hobson's, don't you think?" Jim asked.

"Yes, it's only around the next block. Besides, the moon is nearly full; it should be nice coming back."

An hour later we closed the big front door, locking it behind us, a habit left over from living in the city, and stood together for a moment on the wide veranda. A gentle breeze touched my face; the sky was a purplish-blue, a few stars visible. Lights were beginning to shine behind curtained windows along the street, but other than the soft whoosh of wind in the trees no sound disturbed the quiet. On this peaceful Thursday night it could have been any year, a feeling I had liked about this street from the first.

I slipped my hand into Jim's and we descended the five steps leading to the path and the wrought-iron gate, each of us feeling and enjoying the magic of the night. We crossed the street, and turned up toward the corner a half-block away.

Mrs. Hobson lived in a narrow, two-story Victorian house. I had met her only a few days before when I'd stopped to admire her garden, a perfection of round flower beds, rose bushes, and neat patches of grass contained within a white picket fence. When she found that we were living in the old Summers house she was quick to invite us over to see some early photos of the place.

She opened the door now, her face full of warmth. "I'm so glad you're here. Come in, come in. And you must be Jim." She took his hand in both of hers, and I could tell they liked each other. "You two must call me Clara. Come on into the parlor. I've got the pictures in there."

We sat on a green velvet loveseat in a parlor that could not have changed much from the time it was new, ate little lemon cakes, drank tea, and looked at Clara's photos.

When I came to one of our house when it was fresh and newly built, I felt a surge of excitement. There it was, sitting well back on the lot but with the curving drive immaculate, the lawn carefully trimmed, the trees just beginning to grow to their present height. And in place of the cement sidewalk were brand new board planks. "Look, Jim." I almost whispered the words. "*Look* at the *colors!* Of course you can't tell what they were, but it wasn't white then. They stopped painting houses white after 1860." These had been brilliant colors, several of them, judging from the shades of brown in the old sepia photo. The figure of a young girl could be seen standing next to one of the columns of the veranda and something clicked in my head. "Clara, do you know who this girl was?"

Clara took the picture and held it in her finely wrinkled hands, studying it through gold-rimmed glasses. "Why, that would have to be Annie Summers, Charles Summers's daughter."

I looked carefully, my mind going back to the blue silk book. She was slender, very young, her long skirt nipped in sharply at the waist, her dark hair piled on top of her head. More than that was not possible to tell.

Jim knew why I was curious—the little book had touched him, too—and he leaned forward on his seat. "Do you know anything about the Summers family, Clara?" he asked.

"My, yes. Charles built that house for his wife when he became a judge. He was a good man, they say, but he had an iron will. His wife died six months after they moved in and left him to care for Annie." Clara shook her head. "It seems Annie was in love with some young fellow, wanted to marry him. But Charles wanted to see his only child marry well and he would have none of it. He gave her hand to a gentleman named Joshua Miller—announced the engagement on her eighteenth birthday, I believe."

"Then what happened?" I asked, unable to control my curiosity.

"Well, Annie and Mr. Miller married, but she didn't live out the year. I remember my mother telling me she died of a broken heart." Clara sighed. "They said it nearly killed Charles. He sold the house and went to San Francisco. No one here ever heard from him after that, but it's been called the Summers place ever since."

We were silent for a moment, then Clara smiled brightly. "We mustn't think of such sad events, especially when they are long gone. How would you like to humor a very old lady and look at my stereoscope?"

My eyes met Jim's; we both loved those old cards and spent the next hour or so absorbed in focusing on three-dimensional views of a California that was vastly different from what we see today. Horses were caught forever with a front hoof raised to take the next step into the picture. Ladies' parasols seemed ready to catch the next breeze that would ruffle their laces and ribbons in parks that no longer existed.

It was with genuine gratitude that we thanked Clara for a wonderful evening, and our promise to return was one we knew we'd keep.

As we stepped out onto Clara's porch, the mood of the past still on us, we could hear the sounds of the night. Crickets chirped from beneath her rose bushes and frogs were not far away. At the corner Jim and I turned to wave a farewell to Clara. A single car passed us going in the opposite direction, the hum of its motor the only other sound. In the wash of moonlight we rounded the corner into our own block and looked across the street and down toward our house, a view we had enjoyed on other moonlit evenings when we'd needed to unwind from a day's work. But tonight something was different.

"Jim," I said, "I don't remember leaving all those lights on, do you?" The windows of the house glowed with a wonderfully warm yellow light. They actually did glow, I thought absently, in a way I'd never seen before.

"I'm sure we didn't go off with everything blazing like that. Good heavens, we'd have had to light every room in the house." Jim took my hand. "Maybe some kids got in, but I don't see how; it's locked up pretty tight."

I looked around a little anxiously, possibly hoping to find an answer in the short distance that lay between us and our house. I was puzzled. It was the same street, the same houses stood nearby, yet it wasn't the same. They looked fresh, I thought, the colors more vivid, the yards better cared for. They looked new, as they must have when they were first built eighty or a hundred years before.

This thought must have hit Jim at the same time. He grabbed me hard by the shoulders and turned me to face him, his dark eyes piercing mine. "Lisa. . . ." But he didn't finish whatever it was he was about to say. Neither of us could speak a word; behind us we could hear the slow clip-clop of a horse's hooves, not the harsh sound they make on pavement but a soft thud—the way they sound on a dirt road. Passing us in the night, the moonlight shining on its gleaming black sides, was a light carriage pulled by a fine-looking gray horse. A man held the reins and a woman's soft laughter, as if at some shared joke, floated out behind them as the carriage continued down the road.

It was a narrower road, a dirt road. There was no pavement anywhere. I pulled my eyes away from the receding carriage and looked down at the sidewalk. Something inside me knew what I'd see; wide, new board planks just like the ones in the old sepia photo we had seen at Clara's less than an hour earlier. Then I knew what was different about the lights, not just in our house but in all the houses on the block that still had lights burning in them. It was the warm glow that had to come from gas lighting. There was no electricity, not in our house or any other.

Jim voiced what I could not. "Lisa," he said slowly, "something's happened. This isn't our time, not the time we came out in." His hands fell away from my shoulders. "This has got to be nearly a century ago. That horse and carriage, this street. . . ." He stopped, not knowing what to say any more than I did.

A woman opened the front door of a house nearby. She held a cat in her arms, ready to put it out for the night. Her hair was pulled back on either side of her head, coiled at the back in a style strange and yet familiar. Just like the women in my grandmother's family album, I thought. Her clothes, too, were of a style long gone, her full dark skirt sweeping the porch as she stooped to put the meowing cat on the front step. I could see her face in the moonlight; it was devoid of any makeup and looked tired. Then she turned back into the house and shut the door. In a moment the lights inside slowly dimmed and went out.

"Jim," I said without even thinking, "she just turned out the gas."

"I know." His voice sounded strange but exhilarated. "Let's keep walking."

We moved on more slowly, our logical minds almost shutting off while we allowed our senses to absorb everything around us. The night had a freshness I'd never smelled, not even in the country, and I realized it had to be because the automobile was still years away.

The houses were different colors with not a white one to be seen anywhere. Even by moonlight we could see the rich shades of Indian red, terra cotta, bronze green, orange red, all mixed in wonderfully bright color schemes. Carved cornices were highlighted with lighter shades of greens and yellows, and the windows on one house were detailed with white, then painted a deep chrome yellow.

"Oh, Jim, I wish we could see this by daylight. These houses were—I mean *are* really beautiful."

He nodded. "Look, there aren't any garages stuck wherever they'd fit. All the houses have stables."

It was true, of course. We stood across the street from our own house now, and the narrow garage that had been added by some previous owner was gone, or rather not yet built, and the paint job was new and shining. The body of the house was a deep red, the shingled sides what appeared to be a sort of golden bronze, and the trim was a bronze green, clearly visible in the gaslight spilling onto the veranda.

Several saddle horses stood quietly to one side and carriages of every sort lined the drive as a small boy stood in attendance. One of the horses nickered, and the sound came across to us on the night air, warmer, I noticed, than the night we had started out in. Laughter and music drifted across the immaculate front lawn, and small groups of people in Victorian evening dress moved in and out of the house and onto the veranda.

As we watched, a young girl appeared silhouetted in the front door. She was lovely, her dark hair done in a

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LOST FLAME

by Elena Leone

Young lovers passed by, hand in hand.
A vivid streamer lit her face—
It warmed me, yet disturbed my heart,
Revived joys no one can erase.

Strange how that image soon recalled
Those days when I had worn the same
Bright crimson ribbon through my hair,
And shared a love once kin to flame!

simple style, a few curls wisping about the sides of her face. her cream-colored dress was fitted tightly at the waist and flowed about her to the ground. She cast a quick glance behind her, then suddenly darted across the veranda, her satin slippers barely touching the stairs as she rushed down them and over the lawn. She paused once, then ran swiftly to a spot beside a thick hedge. A tall, blond young man stepped out of the shadows, and in an instant the girl was in his arms, their kiss long and passionate. He held her close and I strained to catch their murmured words, but it was impossible to make out what they were saying. The girl pulled back a little and the man said something, then stooped to a small row of flowers near the hedge and plucked a blossom, pressing it gently into her hand.

I knew with a gripping certainty that it was this blossom, given to Annie on a warm June night in 1882, that would be placed in the blue silk book I was to find almost a century later. "Jim," I whispered urgently, "it's Annie Summers and the boy she wanted to marry!"

Jim nodded silently, all disbelief in what was happening suspended.

At that moment a man came out on the veranda. He was a big, decisive-looking man, both hands thrust deep into his pockets, a large gold watch chain across his belly. He did not speak, but Annie saw him and froze.Frantically she motioned the young man to leave, and for one last second they clung together before he melted into the darkness away from the house.

Annie, eyes downcast, slowly made her way to the front of the veranda, her father—for that had to be who the man was—turning away before he could see her slight figure beside the porch column. In another moment Annie had rejoined the guests. I knew I would never see her again.

Jim took my arm and quietly propelled me down the street, a street so similar and yet so unfamiliar that I could only stare as I realized the changes that were to come in the next century.

We did not speak until we reached the corner where the sound of the party was dim. "How, Jim, how?" I asked.

"I don't know, Lisa," he said softly.

The sound of galloping hooves came rushing down upon us. We spun around just in time to leap out of the way as a wild-eyed horse, his blond rider whipping him on, crossed a field where I knew one day three houses would stand. Jim caught me up in his arms and whirled around the corner where we both sat down shakily on a bench.

Our eyes met but we did not speak. After a long moment I heard the sound of a car, and the headlight beam swung over the crest of the road and bathed the pavement in bright light. Jim put his arm around my shoulders. "I think we can go home now," he said.

I held my breath, wondering if by any chance we would see the house still ablaze with light. But the street was quiet, the board walk replaced with cement, and our house had only one light on in the entry hall—just as we had left it barely three hours earlier.

It was 1980 once again.

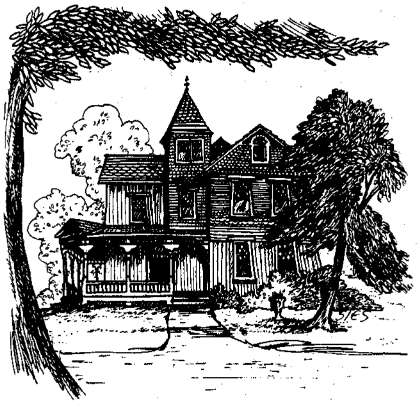
Jim and I sank down on our own sofa and looked around the living room, a room where we had seen dozens of couples dancing only minutes before.

"How did that happen, *what* happened?" I asked, my voice sounding funny.

Jim waited a moment to answer. "I'm not sure," he said slowly. "Maybe when we walked around the corner from Clara's house we somehow crossed a bend in time, somehow really went back into 1882. Somehow we really were standing in front of this house when it was brand new." He shrugged. "Or maybe it was that emotional energy theory. You know, some people claim the intense energy of certain events remains where they happened. People who are especially sensitive can actually feel it, actually *see* the event as it occurred. What do you think?"

"I know it sounds crazy but I think we were really there. I think that was Annie's engagement party we saw. And I know that flower is the one in the blue silk book."

Jim ran a hand through his hair. "There's one thing we can do tomorrow. Tonight I think it's time we got some sleep—if we can."



I did, although not before I had looked long and wonderingly at the small, faded brown blossom, a blossom I had just seen given to a girl who had lived a hundred years ago.

We drove to the newspaper office in Grass Valley as soon as it opened the next morning. Going through the dusty old files, it did not take long to find a copy of *The Union* for June 8, 1882. On page five was an article headlined, "Betrothal of Miss Annie Summers Announced."

> *Charles L. Summers, a prominent citizen and well-known judge, announced the betrothal of his daughter Miss Annie Irene Summers to Mr. Joshua J. Miller at Miss Summers's 18th birthday party held in the family home last evening.*
>
> *Miss Summers appeared very fetching in a cream silk-and-satin gown and matching slippers designed by Worth. . . .*

"That *was* her party," I said almost fiercely. "That dress is the one she was wearing. Last night was the first Thursday in June and so was June 7, 1882." Slowly I closed the file.

Driving up the street I had a moment of intense longing for the June of 1882, for the beauty of those wonderful houses when they were new, for the glow of gaslight that no electric bulb can duplicate, even for the freshness of the air.

As we walked into our living room I felt suddenly sad. Why couldn't Annie have had the love she deserved? My eyes caught a glimpse of something in the corner, a scrap of paper. I bent down to pick it up and found a faded yellow card, very small and folded once.

"What is it?" Jim asked.

"It's Annie's dance program," I whispered unbelievingly. "Look, she left the eighth dance blank. That must have been when she planned to be in the garden."

"But how on earth did it get here? It couldn't possibly have been here before and not been seen by one of us," Jim said slowly.

Silently, almost solemnly, we looked at each other, and Jim's arms closed around me. Who knows if the past is really dead? Or does it exist somewhere just out of sight, a bend in an unseen road, to be found by those who can feel it?

In that moment I had a strange feeling that through us Annie's lost love might, just might, find fulfillment at last in this house where she once lived.

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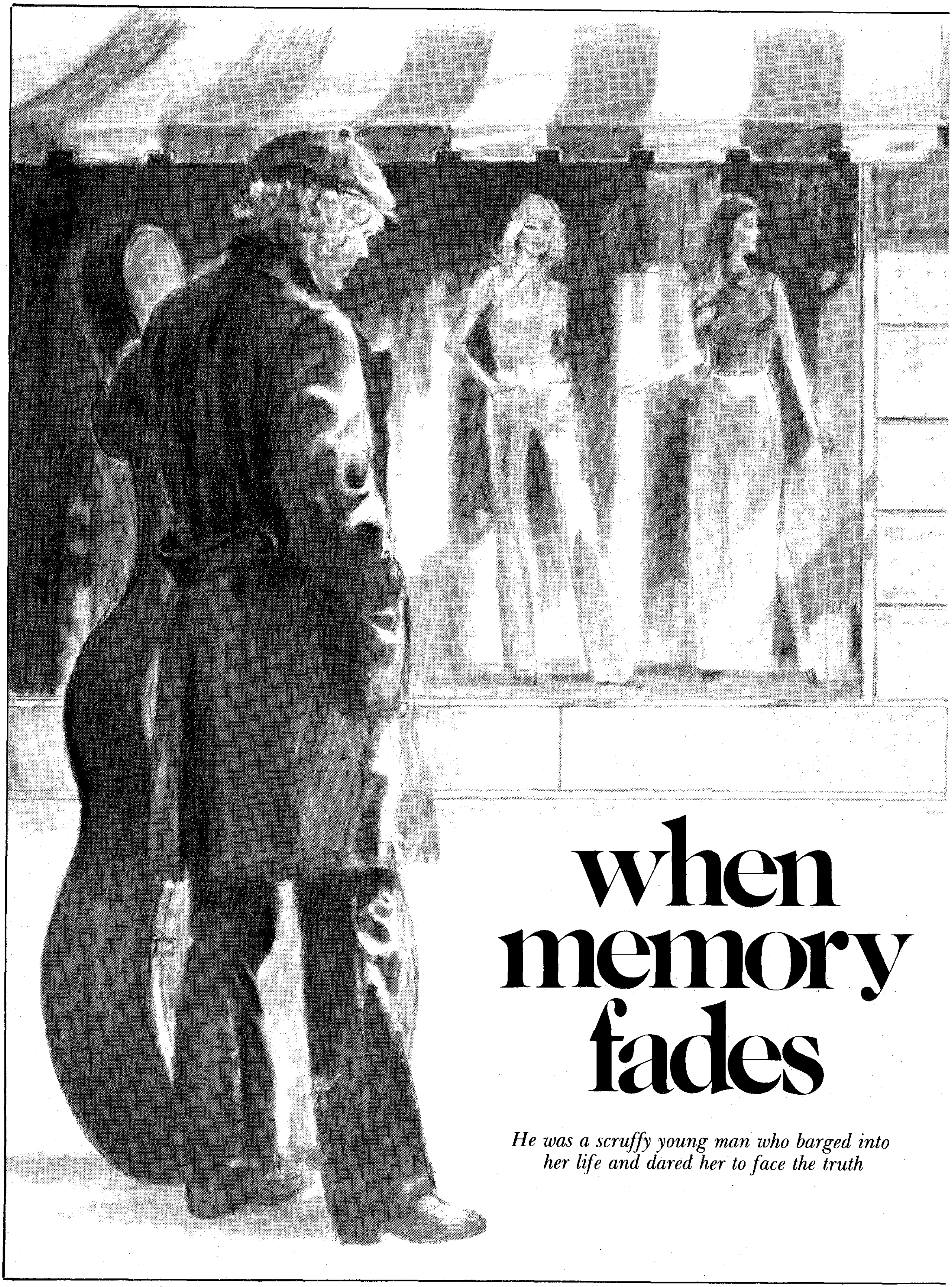
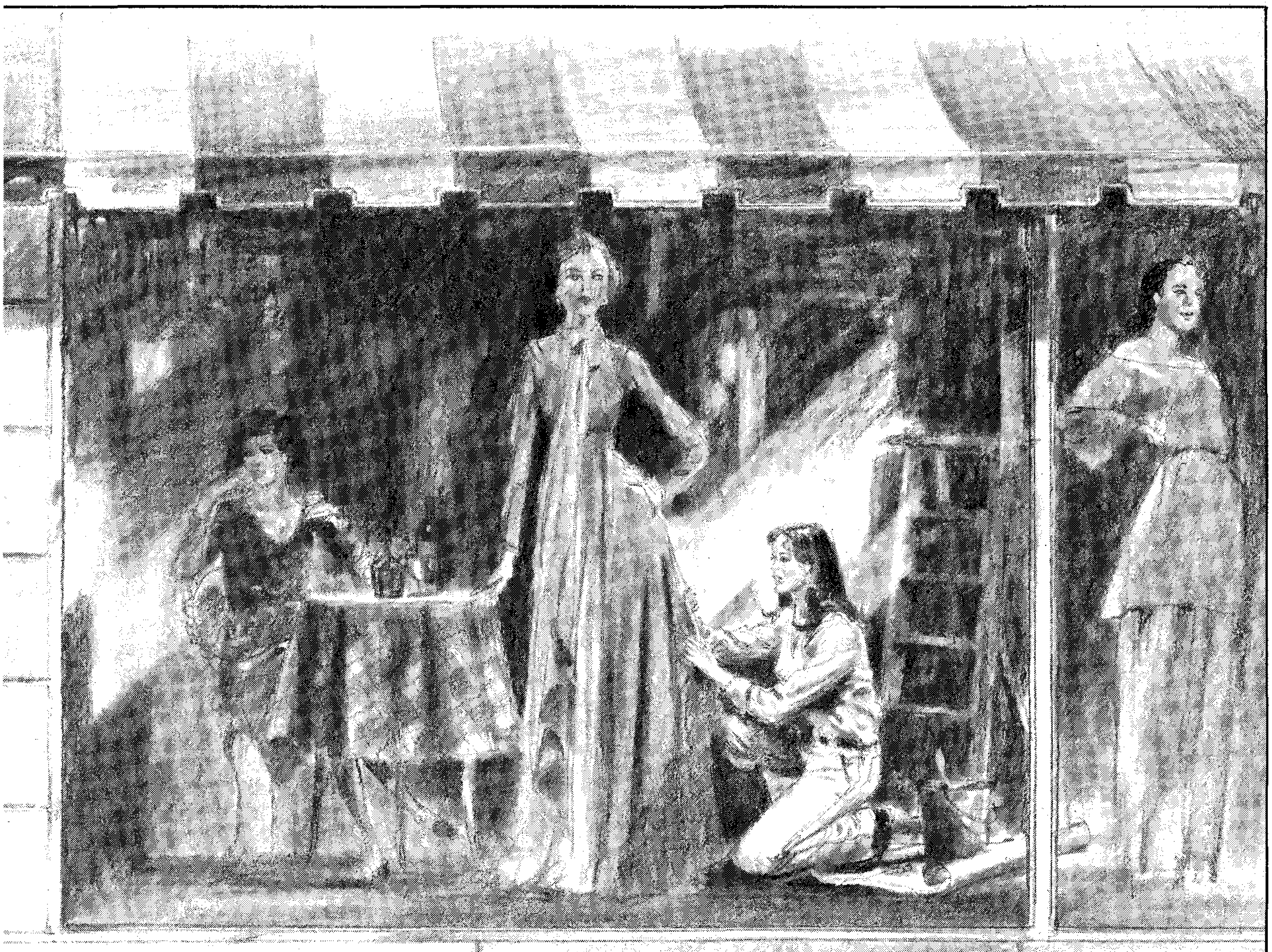


when memory fades

He was a scruffy young man who barged into her life and dared her to face the truth

Illustrated by Jim Woodend



Angie muttered fiercely under her breath. "Come on, you stubborn old bag!" She struggled vainly to screw on Zsa Zsa's left arm. It had always been the same with Zsa Zsa, ever since Angie had come to work at Bloomingdale's. No matter how she changed her around, no matter how many different wigs, different limbs she gave her, underneath it all she remained five-foot-five of beige plaster irritation.

"There," she said with a note of triumph in her voice as she carefully freed the forty pounds worth of coat pinched between Zsa Zsa's arm and shoulder. "You hoped I'd rip it, didn't you, and get into trouble? You'd have enjoyed that, wouldn't you? I'll get you back one of these days, just you wait! I'll sneak up behind you with my hammer and . . ." Her whispered monologue drifted off as she concentrated on the finishing touches, pulled the Saint Laurent silk scarf just a little tighter than necessary and set the shiny navy straw hat at a jaunty angle.

"Now then . . ." Angie took a step back to examine her handiwork.

A short story by Gay Search

"Yes," she said, her eyes half closed, "you'll do."

As she turned to check the layout of the window she saw him, an old tramp in a dirty old coat and a cap, standing in the darkened street just feet away from her, his nose and hands pressed like a lizard's against the glass.

"What—" she started to gasp, her heart beginning to race sickeningly. The other girls had told her about this sort of thing, but she'd never experienced it before. Certainly not in Des Moines, nor in the year she had been working in New York City.

Slowly, fighting for control, she turned away. She mustn't let him see that she was frightened. Frightened? Why? With a good inch of plate glass between them and Joe the security man easily within screaming distance? That was absurd. "Go away," she said loudly. "Go on, go away!"

Then, to her astonishment, she saw that he wasn't old at all—he was about her age, and his cap, like the one Bob Dylan used to wear, was fringed round with the same untidy, almost babyish curls.

"Eh?" he mouthed, putting his hand to his ear like a deaf man. Of course, he couldn't hear what she said, but he could get the gist of it just by looking at her.

"Go away," she said again, this time quietly, as she pointed dramatically down the street like a stern old New England father throwing his fallen daughter out of the house forever. He turned in the direction she was pointing and scanned the street, using his hand as an eyeshade. Then he turned to her, shrugging and shaking his head.

"Oh!" Angie said through clenched teeth. First Zsa Zsa, now this. The other girls had said, "Ignore them and they'll go away." They were probably right. She turned away and, careful to keep her back to him, lugged Zsa Zsa to her place in the front of the window, facing away from the dummies already grouped opposite, their heads together, complaining, so Angie liked to think, about her.

Normally she went out into the street when she'd finished to see how the display looked, but tonight that was impossible. Instead, she carefully walked backward toward the glass to try and assess it from there. As she stopped, there was a sharp rapping on the glass behind her. She started and, in spite of herself, turned around. He was solemnly applauding and nodding his approval. She turned away again, her face carefully arranged to avoid giving a clue to the sudden pleasure she felt inside. No one had ever praised her work before. Not a member of the public anyway—even if he was a rather eccentric member.

"That you, Miss?" a voice called gruffly.

"Yes, Joe, it's me."

"Finished?" He walked slowly toward her through the lines of empty counters shrouded in dust sheets for the weekend. She nodded.

"You shouldn't be working on a Saturday night," he said in a fatherly tone. "A pretty little thing like you ought to be out dancing, enjoying herself."

But she had been enjoying herself—or as close as she got to it these days. She got more pleasure and satisfaction from working on a window after the store had closed than from anything else she could think of. But she couldn't tell Joe that—he'd never understand.

Angie closed the door behind her with the same sense of relief she always felt. She was safe here, private. No one to challenge her, to wriggle their way past the defenses she'd built so carefully around herself.

As she snapped on the light, her eyes as always went straight to the poster above her bed. "Divan Japonaise" it said, "75 rue des martyrs. Ed Fournier, directeur," and in the corner in small, modest letters, "Lautrec." She knew every centimeter of that poster, every line in the old man's beard, every fold in the girl's dress, every curve of every letter. In New York, posters like this were in all the card shops and gift shops, but years ago in Des Moines, when Mike gave it to her, it had been unique. "Here," he had said, ceremoniously lowering the long cardboard tube into her hands, "an engagement present."'

She had looked at him, her eyes smiling, loving him so much it hurt. "But I've already got the ring," she'd said, glancing down at the tiny secondhand diamond that seemed Liz Taylor-size in her eyes.

"I know, but it's not every week we get engaged, is it?" he had grinned. "And anyway, it's for both of us really."

She had carefully pasted the poster to her bedroom wall. "The start of my gallery," she said.

"Fancy pictures," her mother scoffed. "That money would have been much better spent on a pair of pillow cases or a tablecloth." Angie ignored her. She loved the poster. For her it symbolized what Mike and she had together—something rare, something special, something that the folks in Des Moines, folks like her mother, couldn't ever begin to understand. Then without warning Mike had broken it off.

"I'm sorry, Angie," he had said, almost as shattered as she was by the whole thing. "I just don't know what's hit me. I've only known her a couple of weeks . . . and yet I'm certain I'm . . ."

She had turned away, unable to take any more. As if in a trance, she had slipped the ring off her finger and dumbly held it out to him.

"No!" he'd said, the pain in his voice raw and real. "It's yours, you keep it."

"And the poster? . . ." she asked. Her face and mind seemed totally numb.

"You keep it." There was a long pause, neither of them knowing what to say next and both knowing that whatever it was wouldn't make any difference. Then he had gone.

At first Angie couldn't believe it. She and Mike belonged together. Apart they were nothing—or she was noththing, at least. As time went on she heard people talking about Mike and Judy as though it had never been "Mike and Angie." Just before Easter she had heard that they were engaged, and knew that it was finally, irrevocably over. A week later she left for New York, with two big cases containing all her possessions: her clothes, her records and everything Mike had ever given her—*Winnie the Pooh* and *The Lord of the Rings*, the awful stuffed elephant he had won at the carnival, the only two letters he had ever written her, the ring in its octagonal, blue leather box. And of course the poster . . .

She flopped down on her bed, surprised at how tired she suddenly felt. Still, she had finished the window.

It was good, the window she did tonight, and she wasn't the only one who thought so. She rather appreciated her audience of one, after the initial shock. She wouldn't mind him turning up again—not that he would—as long as he stayed on the other side of the glass, on the outside looking in.

Angie pulled open the drawer in the dressing table where she kept all her souvenirs of Mike. This was a nightly ritual, but this evening she merely glanced over the contents, making sure that everything was in its place, then shutting the drawer again. She wasn't really in the mood tonight. . .

Monday morning went very badly. For the first time one of Angie's ideas for a window display was turned down flat, and she was made to do something she thought dull and ordinary: a bunch of neat children standing around in boring little groups. She wanted to put some life into it—boys with one sock up, one sock down, their shirts hanging out as they chased the girls and pulled their hair—but no . . .

Angie had just finished the display

(Continued on page 58)

Illustrated by Bradley Hales Clark

BY KAY STEPHENS

A
CAMEO
NOVEL

THE IRON GATES

"Can't take you any nearer, Miss. You'll have to walk the rest."

The driver of Katherine's hired carriage, stopping outside large iron gates, had alighted then rapped on the window beside her. She frowned, looking toward the great stone house over half a mile away. She had hoped to make an impression by being driven up to the door.

"I'll pay you well . . ." she began.

The man shook his head. "*He* wouldn't like it—Mr. Rushton—can't abide strangers inside the park. Must be nearly three years since . . ."

"But you are bringing me," she protested, "and there's my trunk and . . ."

"Old John at the lodge will take care of that, and show you the way, like as not. I'm sorry, Miss, but it's as much as my job's worth."

Sighing irritably, Katherine took hold of her skirts and stepped down on the wet road. "Please be careful with that box," she directed the coachman as he unloaded her belongings. Whatever would she do if anything befell that precious machine?

Hearing the door of the nearby lodge open, she turned thankfully. A small woman, gray-haired and smiling, looked out. "Miss Sutcliffe?" she inquired.

Katherine nodded, returning the smile.

"If you'll just step inside, Miss Sutcliffe, I'll give my John a call. He'll see to your luggage."

Katherine lowered her head to go through the small doorway, noticing at once the welcoming fire in the grate, the smell of freshly baked bread, the sparkle of well-polished brasses.

"This is nice," she remarked approvingly when the woman returned to the room. "So cozy."

"Thank you, Miss, very kind I'm sure. John won't be long. He's putting your things round the back—to be safe til he's taken you up to the house."

Katherine had just thanked her when she heard a door slam and the sound of boots crossing the stone floored kitchen. The parlor door burst open. A large, robust, elderly man with white hair springing out all round his moon of a face dusted down his palms on either side of grimy trousers, then shyly offered a hand.

"I'm John, ma'am—keep the lodge for the master, and I look after the grounds and stables—with help, of course, from the village."

"How do you do, John?" Katherine took the rough hand in her gloved one. He was much like her own grandfather.

"Sarah, my wife," he went on, "used to keep house for Mr. Rushton, til . . ." Katherine intercepted a covert glance between the two. He shifted uneasily on his feet, ". . . some while ago. Shall I be showing you the way now?"

Katherine needed no help in finding the house, set as it was on the crest of a hill, visible over the treetops of a copse. But she was glad to have somebody beside her.

Until that afternoon, she had given scarcely a thought to her future employer's residence. She had imagined it vaguely as large, maybe the size of the rectory near her own home, but nothing on this scale.

It looked, indeed, from this angle much like a castle—its corner towers, complete with battlements, lending strength to the whole. They appeared ancient, possibly older than the rest of the building.

A hundred yards from the entrance, Katherine paused to study the impressive facade. Rising to a shaped gable and ornamented by crests, this section was higher than those by which it was flanked, although half a story lower than the towers. The windows here were mullioned; the double doors of oak would need, she thought, two men to open each of them.

© Kay Stephens

She smiled to herself, wishing her parents could see her embarking on something that augured of even more distinction than she had intended.

Soon they were mounting the steps. Katherine found she was breathless from a sudden nervousness.

In answer to the jangling bell, a manservant opened one of the massive doors. Katherine turned to John, thanking him for escorting her. She saw him redden, as though unused to courtesy; beneath shaggy eyebrows, wary eyes went to the other man's impassive face.

"'Tis only my job, ma'am," John demurred hastily, turning on his heel. "I'll see to that trunk of yours now."

Katherine followed the frock-coated figure into the hall, feeling the chill, despite being enraptured by its beauty. The sun, electing to show a glimmer, caught exquisite linen-fold paneling; a beam going beyond drew her eyes to the first steps of an elegant staircase.

The balustrade was of delicately wrought iron; above the staircase hung a cut-glass chandelier.

But Katherine was permitted no time to assess or admire her surroundings. Going to high double doors, the man flung them open, awaiting her attention with some impatience. He nodded to her to enter. "I will tell Mr. Rushton of your arrival," he informed her with immense dignity.

It was cool, too, in this room; Katherine noticed the fire, recently kindled, trying to establish itself. This was obviously the drawing room, but was (to her mind) too spacious for true comfort. And yet, the two chairs beside the fire looked inviting; one of them appeared well used, though the other, once its twin, still seemed new. The furnishings were beautiful, with no sign of the slightest need for economy.

Katherine crossed to sit on the edge of a high-backed, velvet-upholstered chair. Then she took a deep breath and settled more comfortably.

She was about to prove herself a woman of some importance. Hadn't she had considerable, intensive training with tutors who were justly delighted with her? Wasn't she one of the few women who had mastered the intricacies of that new invention, the typewriter?

She smiled again, finding, and scanning through, her employer's letter.

Masterton Hall,
Near Maidstone,
Kent.
23rd October, 1875

Dear Miss Sutcliffe,

You will please present yourself at the above address before four in the afternoon, on Tuesday of next week, for the purpose of commencing your employment as my secretary.

The signature was a scrawl, but she knew it to be Lawrence Rushton's. And she could scarcely believe, even now, that she was here in the house of this great writer, about to start working with him.

"Refreshing your memory?" Rapped out from three yards away, the words startled her. Katherine sprang to her feet, dropping gloves, muff, and the letter.

He watched from what seemed a great height, tall and slender as he was, his brown, almost black, eyes noting her discomfort while she retrieved her possessions.

"How do you do?" Katherine murmured, her face suffused with a glow as she thrust her things onto a chair, so she might offer him her hand.

He sniffed, made no move to take the hand. She withdrew it slowly. He came nearer then, and she saw that his right arm ended somewhere in the folds of his cuff.

Katherine forced her glance to keep away from that incomplete arm, raised her eyes to his, and found them challenging. She managed a smile. "I am happy to have arrived here."

"Happy?" His tone was mocking. "Well, since you've come, we'll waste no time over tiresome pleasantries. We work from eight-thirty til six, with half an hour at midday for luncheon. Today, however, because your arrival has interrupted my concentration, I will return to my desk after dinner; you will please join me in the study at—" he considered for a moment—"eight o'clock."

Katherine nodded, disconcerted by his insistence on an immediate start. She'd traveled for two days, staying one night with an aunt because of the distance involved. Briefly, she contemplated protesting on account of tiredness, but something in Lawrence Rushton's expression warned he wouldn't take kindly to opposition.

"Very well, sir."

"Do I observe a hint of reluctance? You're here to be of use, remember. If you fear you will lack sufficient time to unpack, there are fully three hours before dinner. Unless you have a remarkable collection of clothing and impedimenta, that ought to be enough!"

Katherine swallowed back a retort.

The man was still studying her minutely; embarrassed, she longed to tell him to look to his manners.

"And the machine . . . ?" he inquired. "This . . . er . . . typewriter, you have it safely?"

"At the lodge, Mr. Rushton, with the rest of my things. John will attend to them, I believe."

"Saunders—yes." He crossed the room briskly, and reached for the bell-pull. "Mrs. Hawkins will show you your room. I'll get Rivers . . ."

Rivers came in. "Yes, sir?"

"Mrs. Hawkins was in the dining room. Tell her to leave what she is doing and show this . . . Miss, er . . ."

"Sutcliffe," Katherine prompted.

Mr. Rushton's glance implied she had spoken out of turn. " . . . to her room," he finished, then turned his back on them.

Katherine followed Rivers across the hall, and waited, gazing into the dining room. It was exquisite, dominated by a long mahogany table, with an elegant sideboard in the Regency style, the matching chairs upholstered in gold brocade.

Whatever else, Lawrence Rushton was a man of taste; she would enjoy living in such pleasant surroundings. Her own home (which suddenly seemed very far away) was comfortable and bright, but she'd never before even visited a house of this grandeur.

"This way." Mrs. Hawkins, tall and stately, although too heavily built for pretentions toward beauty, sailed round the door and swept to the staircase. She didn't wait for Katherine to gather her skirts to mount the stairway. It seemed as if she were some mighty flag-ship and Katherine an unimportant tug in her wake, chugging uncomfortably to keep up.

The stairs appeared endless, winding as they climbed, and Katherine's hand went to the wrought iron balustrade for help. They were, she observed, beyond the first story, and the stairs here were uncarpeted. After they had reached these bare steps Mrs. Hawkins at last led the way along a corridor. Dark and stale-smelling it was, without windows, and illuminated by a single gas mantle.

Disappointment descended on Katherine's spirits. The door flung open by the housekeeper revealed a stark little room. She looked to Mrs. Hawkins, wishing to complain that she was not some menial to be banished to the servants' attics—but the woman was regarding her with a sombre pretence of a smile. "Mr. Rushton is sure you will be comfortable here."

"Comfortable!" Katherine thought. What kind of man was he—so obviously admiring delightful surroundings, yet readily consigning the woman who would work with him to such dreariness?

She sighed when Mrs. Hawkins had gone, and went to unlock her trunk, which had been brought to the room. Slowly she went around setting out her treasured possessions. The silver-backed hairbrush, a gift from her grandmother on her twenty-first birthday, looked strangely incongruous on the old marble washstand, its neighbors a chipped jug and basin.

The room lacked a dressing table. There was only a heavy chest of drawers with peeling paint. Carefully, Katherine laid her undergarments in the drawers which were, if nothing else, clean and dust-free.

The door of the wardrobe creaked, as though the merest touch would tear it from its hinges. She steeled herself against weeping and started hanging dresses in the monstrosity.

This wasn't how she had pictured her first job. The setting should have been bright and airy to do justice to the clothes she had brought. Katherine thought wryly of the hours spent with her needle, transforming yards and yards of silks and satins, fine woolens and lace, into the gowns she was now unpacking. Greens and blues vied with pinks and purples, bows with frills, for attention.

What had she imagined . . . ?

Remembering the box and its precious contents, she glanced round, frowning. And then her face cleared. Of course, it would have been taken to Mr. Rushton's study.

Katherine looked at the tiny gilded clock which she had set on the chest of drawers. Thoughts of the evening ahead reminded her how time was passing. Swiftly, she unpacked the rest of her things, pushing them uncaringly into the available spaces in drawers or wardrobe—since all was so unsightly here, there seemed little point in her normal neatness.

Her task completed, Katherine went at last to the window. Small and drably curtained, it could in no way diminish the magnificence of what it revealed. She gasped delightedly.

Hills rolled gently into the distance, green fields, and brown where the ploughman had been busy; sheep grazing lazily, and a flock of lapwings, wheeling then slowly descending. The evening sky, slashed with blue now the rain clouds were vanishing, sat on far, purple-hazed hills; and somewhere in the middle distance through misty trees, russet in their autumnal beauty, was a glimpse of a lake. In the mist surrounding the lake something moved, startling her; there it was again—a pale brown shape, and another. Deer. She looked more intently and spotted several among the trees.

Katherine smiled and turned from the window. So there would be an escape, she could walk as far as the lake; wander, maybe, through the copse just below the house, get away from the harsh reality of this abominable cell.

She breathed deeply; it would take more than this slight on her position here to crush her. Having summoned courage to come, she must show Lawrence Rushton she was no mere girl to be deterred by his treatment; and she'd begin right now. The gown she'd worn for travelling was crumpled; she would change before dinner; then, she hoped, make those incredibly hard eyes widen, those forbidding brows arch toward his hair.

Katherine selected an emerald green dress in fine wool because of the ominous chill of the place. She had to steady her fingers, fastening the tiny buttons of her bodice, and her reflection showed apprehensive eyes. They were arresting, though. She was aware they frequently drew glances. Green, they gazed back from the old, tarnished mirror. "My good feature," she thought. "If only I were a beauty, that arrogant master of the house might take more account of me."

Forcing a confident smile, Katherine went along that dreary corridor to descend the stairs. Once her feet touched carpet, her step was lighter, more positive. Away from that room, she would be a woman of some consequence.

Outside the dining room door she paused, took a deep breath before reaching for the handle. She raised her chin, smiling, sure she was looking poised, composed, the perfect companion. What was there, after all, to scare her?

He was sitting at the farthest end of the long table. A book was propped against a crystal decanter and, frowning, he glanced from it and stopped eating.

"Yes?" He appeared astonished to see her.

"It is time for dinner?" she began.

Lawrence Rushton's lip curled. "You seem to have missed your way—ring the bell. Rivers will show you where to go . . ." He returned to his book.

Katherine blinked.

He glanced up again, impatiently. "Well, go along then . . ."

Ignoring his suggestion to summon Rivers, as she made for the door; as it closed behind her she discovered she was trembling. He must never learn, she vowed, how easily he had reduced her almost to tears.

Following the aroma of cooking, finding the kitchen was simple enough, but how Katherine hated having to enter. Mrs. Hawkins presided over the table—one side being occupied by several girls, whom Katherine took to be maids and domestics.

A young man, whose apparel proclaimed him the coachman, sat opposite, with a girl in a dark dress next to him. Rivers was supervising another maid as she prepared a silver tray at a side table. "Good evening," Katherine greeted them. Nobody answered. Mrs. Hawkins nodded, pointing to a vacant seat beside the coachman.

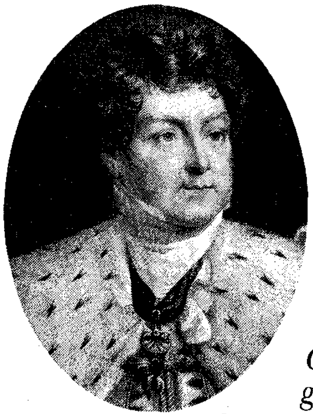
He alone spoke to her during the meal, confirming her guess as to his occupation. Introductions, it seemed,

(Continued on page 69)

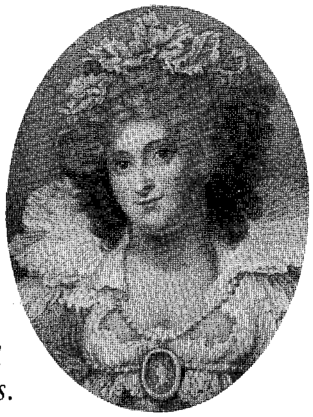
A CAMEO FEATURE

A Gift of Love

THE ROYAL PAVILION



Prinny's Folly



Once, the Pavilion housed glorious banquets and balls. For Mrs. Fitzherbert it now held the memory of a magnificent and painful past

The two women sat with their backs to the promenade, ignoring the rush of phaetons and closed carriages threading their way along the busy street behind, looking instead at the ebbing tide. The year 1817 was drawing to a close, but the warmth of the sun made it feel like an early summer's day.

Mrs. Fitzherbert and Mary Seymour—the sixteen-year-old daughter of her deceased best friend, Lady Horatia Seymour—had arrived in Brighton just three days earlier. Mary had been only eight when Lady Horatia died, and Mrs. Fitzherbert had fought the court to adopt and raise the girl. Her six-year battle had finally ended in victory, and now, after two years of adoring motherhood, Mrs. Fitzherbert had decided to show Mary the town, the seaside resort sixty miles south of London she had helped create some thirty-two years earlier.

"Why did we come here, Mama?" Mary asked.

"I felt the need to escape the tedium of London," Mrs. Fitzherbert answered. "It's been such an ill-tempered year, and the sea air usually helps to restore my failing spirits. That and a look at my pavilion."

"Your pavilion?" Mary questioned, her surprise evident. "What *do* you mean?"

Mrs. Fitzherbert leaned back against the hard, wooden seat and sighed, her ample bosom seemingly moving in tandem with the lapping waves. Then, with a dramatic gesture, she indicated the multi-domed building that stood majestically to her left. "That one," she said quietly. "It was my home once, Mary. Built for me many years ago."

Mary gazed in fascination at the gleaming pile of domes and minarets that

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By Leonora Blythe

topped the pavilion. Her blue eyes, large in their curiosity, silently begged for more information.

"There was nothing but a small farmhouse when we first moved down here," Mrs. Fitzherbert remarked, her voice taking on a reminiscent resonance, "but what a marvelous time we had creating that."

"Who built it for you, Mama?" Mary asked, her face alive with anticipation. "Please, please tell me about it."

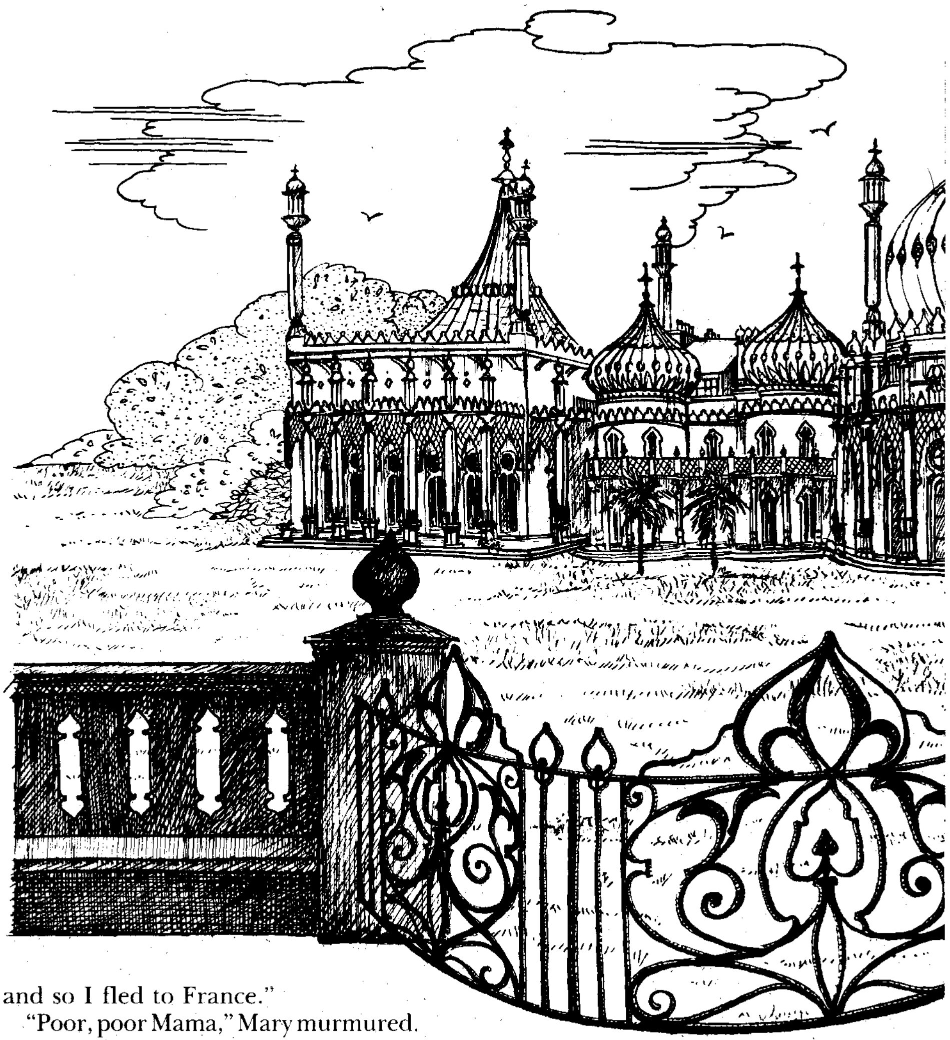
Mrs. Fitzherbert searched her daughter's face intently for a few moments and then, as though she had come to some decision, nodded briskly. "Very well, my dear. I have tried to conceal the truth from you in the past to protect you from Court gossip, but I think you are old enough to be told what happened." She looked toward the pavilion briefly and then settled herself as best she could. "It's a long story, for I'll have to go back to when I first arrived in London," she began. "Oh, Mary, what an exciting era it was! I, though only twenty-five, had already been twice widowed. I was tentative about my reentry into Society after my second period of mourning and had no idea that I would cause such a stir or that I would be so well received."

There was a dreamlike quality to her voice now and Mary, hardly daring to breathe, felt as though she was being taken back in time. She had always been aware of a mystery surrounding her mother and now, at last, it appeared as though she was going to hear about it.

"The *Morning Herald* wrote of me, 'A new constellation has lately made an appearance in the fashionable hemisphere that engages the attention of those whose hearts are susceptible to the power of beauty,'" Mrs. Fitzherbert continued. "I was besieged from every quarter by some of the finest young men in England, but I wasn't swayed by any of them—until I met the prince."

"Prinny?" Mary exclaimed in tones of disbelief. The Prince Regent, who would not be crowned George IV until 1821, was the royal and social leader of England. Yet, in the few years Mary had known him, she had never regarded him as a romantic. Perhaps it had been his treatment of her, that of a doting uncle, that had clouded her perception.

Mrs. Fitzherbert nodded. "Prinny," she concurred, and then paused as though caught up in the moment of that first meeting. "We fell helplessly, passionately in love, but because of my Catholic faith there could be no thought of marriage without him forfeiting the throne. It was an impossible situation and so I fled to France."



"Poor, poor Mama," Mary murmured. "It must have been awful for you."

"It was, but"—a wistful smile creased Mrs. Fitzherbert's face—"the entire time I was in France the prince testified to the intensity and violence of his feelings by the most extravagant expressions and actions. Every day a hand-chosen messenger would arrive bearing letters and gifts. I ignored all his entreaties, however, for I had no ambition to become his mistress. Finally, he wrote that he had persuaded his father, George III, to agree to a secret marriage. I believed him. I had to believe him, for the idea of living without him had become unbearable. We were married a week later in London, and after the ceremony the prince himself wrote out the marriage certificate and gave it to me for safekeeping."

"You . . . you actually were married to him, Mama?" Mary asked. "Why, I . . . I thought you only the best of friends . . ." she said, letting her voice trail off as she remembered all those years that the prince had been her mother's almost constant companion.

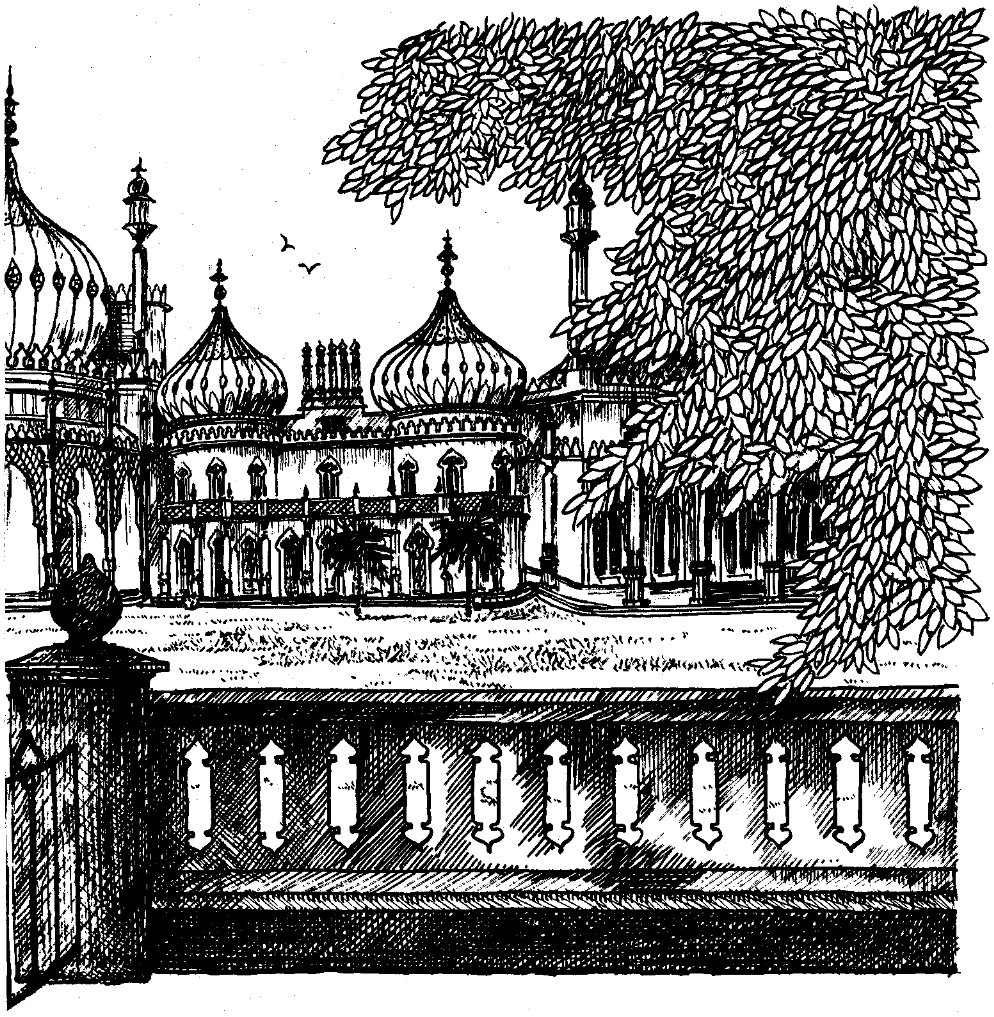
"In the eyes of both our churches we were man and wife," Mrs. Fitzherbert continued, oblivious to the interruption, "but there were two Acts of Parliament that ruled against the validity of such an alliance." There was no bitterness in her voice as she spoke, just a faint trace of sadness that only hinted at the distress she must have felt.

"So you came to Brighton to escape the gossip?" Mary asked in an effort to ease the tension.

Mrs. Fitzherbert nodded. "We came here to enjoy our marriage in peace. It was a hopeless gesture, though, for Prinny's love of society was totally ungovernable. He was uncomfortable living in the confined space afforded by the farmhouse and within a few weeks had commissioned Henry Holland to design something a little more elegant. He wanted the house rebuilt in a style fit to receive his friends."

"And that was the result?" Mary asked, looking at the pavilion in amazement. "It . . . it almost looks like a folly,"

Illustrated by Leora M. Sies



she ventured as her mother remained silent.

"I think someone once remarked that it was Prinny's expression of an exuberant love affair. But, I'm ahead of myself. The beginnings were small. Just a bow-fronted house topped by a shallow dome. Over the years we added onto it. We tried to economize, for Prinny's debts amounted to over half a million pounds, but our imagination knew no bounds and I'm afraid we overspent. I remember the day someone gave us a roll of glorious Chinese silk wallpaper, and without a second thought we decided to build a Chinese gallery for it. One did not need to have a taste for the Orient to appreciate this wing, only an eye for color and exquisite craftsmanship, and it helped to have the imagination to understand the variations Prinny played on Regency Gothic. Indeed, he was outraged when a friend of his, William Daniell, said that there wasn't a single feature that accorded with the purity, grandeur and magnificence that characterized the genuine Oriental style. Prinny's whole point of building such a place, you see, was to break all existing rules. The result of this particular piece of criticism was that he decorated the rest of the interior with a Chinese motif. It became known as the Oriental Pleasure Dome and it was where we did most of our entertaining."

"Did you have parties every night? Were you not exhausted?"

"Every night, but then we seldom rose before three in the afternoon. There will never be a time like it again, Mary, never. We had bands playing from dinner until we retired, and there was such an abundance of food and wine that it was impossible for anyone to leave our tables and complain of an empty stomach. There were hot soups and roasts as well as an unending supply of cold food. In addition to wines there was always iced champagne, and peaches, grapes, oranges, and pineapples were piled everywhere. Each guest was attended by a footman, whether there were ten for dinner or fifty. And Lord Alvanley—who was a constant guest—so much enjoyed a cold apricot tart our chef served that he ordered his own chef to have one on the sideboard every day throughout the year. You can imagine how expensive that must have been." She laughed at the memory. "And our Pleasure Dome was so much admired that we almost decided to encase the whole of it in a Chinese pagoda."

"Oh, no," Mary said, her face pulled into an expression of distaste.

"No, indeed. Thank goodness Prinny succumbed to his discovery of the Moorish style and instead of the pagoda allowed William Porden to build immense stables. See—those outbuildings there." She pointed to an elaborate structure and to Mary's untrained eye it looked as though the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral had come down to Brighton and pupped. "After they had been completed," Mrs. Fitzherbert continued, her face showing her amusement, "Prinny complained that his horses were better stabled than ourselves."

"And knowing Prinny," Mary interjected, joining in her mother's merriment, "I expect he ordered another extension for the pavilion."

"Of course," Mrs. Fitzherbert agreed, "with secret tunnels connecting all the buildings. Although," she added mischievously, "the one most often used was between the Oriental Dome and my apartments. Prinny loved mystery, and it gave him great pleasure to suddenly appear on my balcony without being seen entering."

Mary studied the buildings intently for a while, allowing her mother time to recall those tender meetings. "I think it looks quite beautiful," she said finally, "even though the style seems somewhat out of place in England."

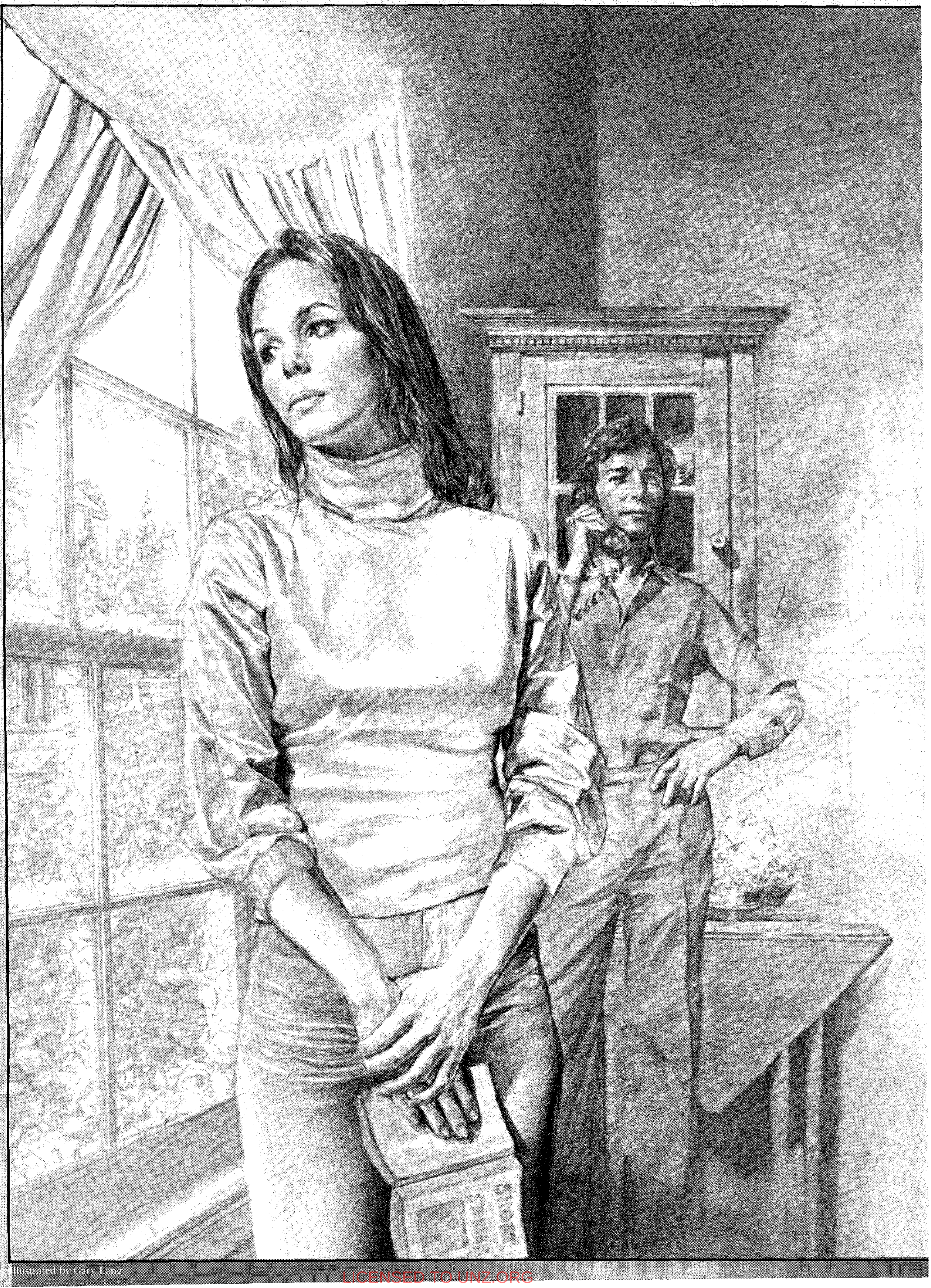
"It's romantic, exotic, and magical, although I have to agree that architecturally it's madness."

"How long did it take to build, Mama?"

"With Prinny, my dear, it's a never-ending labor. I wouldn't be at all surprised if he isn't still adding to it now. Before . . . before I left him for the last time, he had undertaken to redo the kitchens and even went so far as to have its roof supported by iron columns representing palm trees. It was a small attempt, he said, to enliven the working atmosphere of the scullery maids. And I heard recently that he has just installed a new chandelier in the Banqueting Room that weighs over a ton. Do you realize, Mary, that if it should fall whilst everyone is seated for dinner they would all be killed?" She shuddered at the thought. "I wouldn't have allowed it. I would have found a way to persuade him not to install it."

Her voice was fading and Mary, anxious to know what had actually

(Continued on page 62)



Illustrated by Gary Lang

Magic Might Happen

Victoria was certain her father's accountant would have a face and soul like an adding machine—and if he had, everything would have been infinitely easier

A short story by Rosamunde Pilcher

There are times in one's life that one remembers as being good, even if they only last for a month or two, or even a week, or a couple of days. That summer was a good time.

It was drawing toward the end of August. My father suggested a holiday, but my mother had already promised to visit her sister Charlotte in Sutherland, in September, so we stayed at home, just the three of us, and lay in the garden, did a little desultory gardening, and ate all our meals on the terrace.

We live in a large and rambling old house, and the fact that it is really too big, with a garden that has been allowed to go half wild, is more than compensated for by the little river which flows gently around its boundary, willow-fringed and speckled with shafts of sunlight. The river bubbles down in a series of small water splashes and little pools. But at one special place there is a pool deep enough to swim in.

On this particular day I had spent the whole afternoon there, alternately lying in the sun with a book and wading into the cool water when I could bear the heat no more. Finally, as the shadows lengthened I made my way back to the house.

My mind was full of cool thoughts, cool images. A shower, perhaps; a Chopin prelude on the record player; the cold salmon I knew we were going to eat for supper. As I came up the sloping lawn I heard the telephone ring indoors and my mother answer it. Fearing that it might be someone to speak to me, I loitered in the garden.

After the brightness outside, the hall was dim. My mother materialized as though out of darkness.

"Oh darling, that call was for you. Roger Marsden. He wants you to call him back."

I knew a moment of secret satisfaction that I had had the wit to delay my entrance. "What does he want?"

"They're having a barbecue this evening. He wondered if you'd like to go."

Her voice pleaded slightly. She longed for me to be a social success, leading a life of perpetual dates and outings. I loved her very much and did not want to disappoint her, but no amount of telling could persuade her that if I was lost in a book, it was because I loved the book, not because I hadn't been asked out. Besides, I didn't really like Roger.

I said, "I don't want to go."

"Now, why not? Roger's so nice . . ."

"Just because his mother and you are bosom friends, it doesn't follow that Roger and I have to be, too. I'm sorry, but I don't want to go. I want to eat cold salmon with you and Dad. Besides, there's a gorgeous concert on television . . ."

"Victoria, you're eighteen. It's unnatural to be so unsociable."

"Then you have mothered an unnatural child," I said lightly. "I know; I'm a disappointment to you." I kissed her. "Just try not to be too disappointed. And I'll ring Roger and tell him I can't make it."

At that moment the phone rang again, and my mother, with an exasperated glance in my direction, found it was my father. I sat on the stairs and listened, and because he always talks on the telephone as though it had never been invented, their two voices were entirely audible.

"Diana."

"Yes, darling?"

"Would it be all right if I brought a man home for dinner this evening and to stay the night?"

"But of course," said my mother instantly, without taking time to think if she had enough food on hand. "Who is he?"

"He's down from London. From Fleming Bernsteins, actually."

My mother raised her eyebrows. "That sounds exciting. When will you be home?"

"About seven. See you then."

"Stephen!" called my mother in a panic, before he could hang up. "What's the man's name?"

"John Stebbings," said my father.

My mother put down the receiver and looked at me.

"My guess," I said, "is that something is up."

"Yes, it is. It's a secret, but I don't suppose it matters telling you, if you keep it to yourself. Your father's negotiating to take over Topley's furniture business—you know, that little factory over on the other side of Thornleigh. They make kitchen tables, that sort of thing . . ."

"I thought it was an old family firm."

"Yes, it is, and has been for years, but I'm afraid these are changed days, and with inflation and taxation and all the rest of it, they're beginning to feel the pinch."

"You mean, Crayshaws would start making furniture as well as floorings?"

"Something like that."

"And who's going to raise the money?"

"That's where Mr. Stebbings comes in. Fleming Bernsteins are commercial bankers."

"I see," I said, not sure how I felt about all this, but hating the soullessness of big business. Somehow the very name of Mr. Stebbings personified this. He would be bald and thin and have a face like an adding machine.

I heard the car arrive as I was changing. My parents were talking in their room, and I imagined Mr. Stebbings was also occupied in the guest room, perhaps changing one dull suit for another, and a gloomy tie for some tasteful number in best red brocade.

I wandered into the living room and was startled when a male form instantly put down the paper and unfolded itself from a corner of the sofa.

"Good evening," said Mr. Stebbings.

I am very shy. Being suddenly flung face to face with a new person has always left me speechless. I might not have been so speechless if Mr. Stebbings had lived up to my imaginings. But he was tall, with thick dark hair, and young. His face was deeply tanned and he looked as though he had spent some time playing tennis and squash. His eyes were very dark. There was something disconcerting in their steady gaze and I realized that he was waiting for me to say something.

"Good evening." It came out in a sort of high pitch.

"You must be Victoria. I'm John Stebbings."

We shook hands. It seemed very formal. I said, "I thought you were still upstairs, getting changed."

"No. I'm downstairs, reading the newspaper."

I wondered if he was laughing at me. "Have you got a drink?"

"Not yet."

"Would you like one?"

"Thank you."

My father had left some bottles and glasses out on a tray. I said, "Would you like to help yourself?"

"All right." He laid down the newspaper and went to the tray. "Can I pour something for you?"

I like white wine. He poured it and a sherry for himself, and handed me my glass. There was another pause.

I said, "Would you like to go out into the garden? It's still so warm." Somehow I felt it would be easier to cope with him out of doors. We could talk about the roses and the hot weather. He said that he would like that so we went out and settled ourselves on to the terrace.

He said, "Your father tells me you're going to the university in October. What are you going to study?"

"English and history."

"Have you been away from home before?"

"No, I was at day school."

"You'll miss all this." He glanced about him, and I was pleased by his perception, because I knew I was going to miss it badly—the drowsy garden and the gentle old house.

"Yes, I know I will," I added. "It used to be the minister's, the house I mean."

"I don't know whether it's due to that fact, but it has a charming atmosphere."

I had begun to feel less shy. I said, "Where do you live?"

"In London. Where I work."

"Did you always live there?"

"No, I hail from the black North."

He didn't sound as though he had liked it much. I said, "My Aunt Charlotte lives in Scotland. In Sutherland. She loves it."

"It's hardly the same thing." His voice was cool, and I wondered if he meant to sound as cutting as he did. To show him that I was not going to be intimidated, I asked boldly, "Is my father's firm going to take over Topley's?" and was rewarded by his expression of astonished disapproval.

"How did you know about that?"

"My father told my mother and my mother told me. Don't worry, I won't breathe a word. I just wanted to know if it was true."

"You'll know when it's a *fait accompli* and not a moment before."

"Does Mr. Topley mind being taken over?"

He gave me a glance in which irritation and amusement were mixed in about equal proportions. "No, I don't think he does. In a way I think he's relieved."

"Does it mean a lot of people will be fired?"

"Perhaps a few. But that's better than the business being declared bankrupt and closing down and everybody losing their jobs."

I said, "I hate it."

"What do you hate?"

"Big business. Big fish swallowing little fish. People losing sight of the only thing that matters—other people."

"You have," said John Stebbings, "to sail with the wind."

"I like things to stay the same."

"So do we all. But they don't." He raised his glass to me. "*Salud*, Victoria," he said, and realized that he had ended the conversation.

When dinner was over my father took John Stebbings into his study; the sound of their muted voices came steadily from behind the closed door. After a time my mother went to bed, asking me to make her excuses to our visitor.

I put some soothing Brahms on the stereo and lay on the sofa with *The Mill on the Floss*. When I am truly involved in a book, I become unaware of anything else. I only knew that suddenly it had become too dark to read, that a door had opened and shut, and . . .

John Stebbings materialized out of the gloom and sat down at the other end of the sofa, gently moving my feet to one side.

I gazed at him owlishly, slowly remembering who he was. He said, "You'll strain your eyes, trying to read in this light."

"I didn't realize it had got so dark. My mother said to say good night to you. She's gone to bed."

"And your father is telephoning. He told me to come and talk to you."

Caught in the velvety half-light, we looked at each other. I said, "I'm not very good at talking. I mean, I'm not very good at making conversation."

"Then we'll do something else."

He was far too close to me. My heart leapt in a panic. For an idiotic instant I imagined being grabbed by him and kissed. Roger had once done this, pressing his lips, unasked, to my mouth, scratching my face with his moustache. That was why I disliked him.

But this was Mr. Stebbings, of Fleming Bernsteins. Desperately, I fished for some way to entertain him, but only one thought came to mind.

"We could go swimming."

"Swimming?" I could hardly have astonished him more.

"Yes. It's lovely. In the river. There's a pool, and it's very clean and not polluted at all, and quite deep. You can borrow a pair of my father's trunks."

Suddenly it did not seem like such an outrageous idea after all. I jumped off the sofa. When he didn't move, I frowned down at him.

"You don't want to?"

"I didn't say that."

"You're scared!"

"What of?"

"Being cold. Getting wet. Drowning."

He began to laugh. He put out a hand and I pulled him to his feet. He said, "What are we waiting for?"

In my room I wriggled into my bikini, threw on a beach robe, and ran downstairs. By now it was nearly dark, but there were stars in the sky and a chill dampness in the air. I shivered, not from cold, but with a sort of excitement. There has always been something very special about the garden at night, as though magic might happen, as in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. When he came, I led the way down the sloping lawn.

Beneath the trees he said, "I can't see a blessed thing."

"Just a few more feet. There's no mud. Just stones. A sort of little beach." I dropped my robe and put one foot into the running stream, but it felt so cold I let out a yelp.

He said, "Have you changed your mind?"

"No, of course not, it's just that . . ."

But he, braver than I, had waded into the water and disappeared with hardly a splash.

"Come on." He swam a few strokes, his feet kicking up a small wake. "Come on, you coward, it was your idea."

I screwed up my face and my courage and followed him. The cold took my breath away. When I came up, gasping for air, the darkness seemed total. I treaded water, trying to get my bearings.

Out of the darkness his voice said, "Where are you?"

"Here."

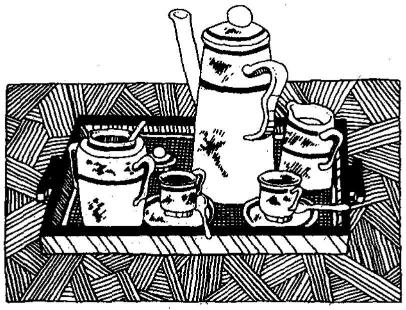
There was a soft sound, a ripple, a movement of water. I kicked my feet and swam toward the sound, and the next moment my hand rested on his bare shoulder. It felt very smooth and hard and pleasant. He said my name and it was as though the strong movement of the running water had washed us together. His arms were around me, his mouth on my mouth. And now, for the first time in my life, I wanted to be kissed. I wanted the hardness of his cheek against mine.

I managed to say at last, "I didn't mean this to happen."

"No," he said gently, "I know you didn't."

I was struck by a sensation of weightlessness. He, so much taller than I, was well within his depth, and I realized that he was wading with me toward the bank. I tentatively laid my head on his shoulder and my long hair dripped like a wet rope down his back. We came out of the water, out of the shelter of the trees, and I looked up and saw that the sky, once more, was full of stars.

I had been surrounded by love all my life—the love my parents had for each other, the love they had for me. I had read of passionate love in books, in *Romeo and Juliet*, in *Wuthering Heights*. I had watched it in the theater, had seen how it happened to people I knew, but had never imagined it happening to me. But now it had happened. I would never be the same. Nothing would ever be quite the same again.



The next afternoon John returned to London. I did not mind, because I knew that he would come back. He would write to me, he would call me. I went downstairs early each morning to scan the paper. Nothing. Each time the telephone rang, instead of loitering in the garden, I went to answer it, disciplining myself not to run. Nothing. I waited for my father to tell me that he was coming back for another visit. But a week passed. Nothing. Another week. Nothing.

I did all the classic things. Played the piano until my back and my fingers ached. Went for exhausting walks, read books. I even lost my never very robust appetite.

My parents began watching me in a way that drove me mad, their expressions concerned, their eyes sympathetic. Finally, one day, it began to rain. Rain fell in sheets, and my tears matched the rain. I could not stop them from falling. It was over almost before it had begun. He was never coming back.

My mother, by some marvelous maternal instinct, came to my room and found me facedown on my bed and howling. She sat beside me and I turned and hugged her as I had not done since I was a very small child and having nightmares about monkeys.

"It's John Stebbings, isn't it?" she said at last, when I had cried myself dry and was sufficiently coherent to talk about it.

"Yes."

"Oh, my darling." She sounded despairing. "I was afraid of it. I've been afraid of it ever since he was here."

I blew my nose. "Why so afraid?"

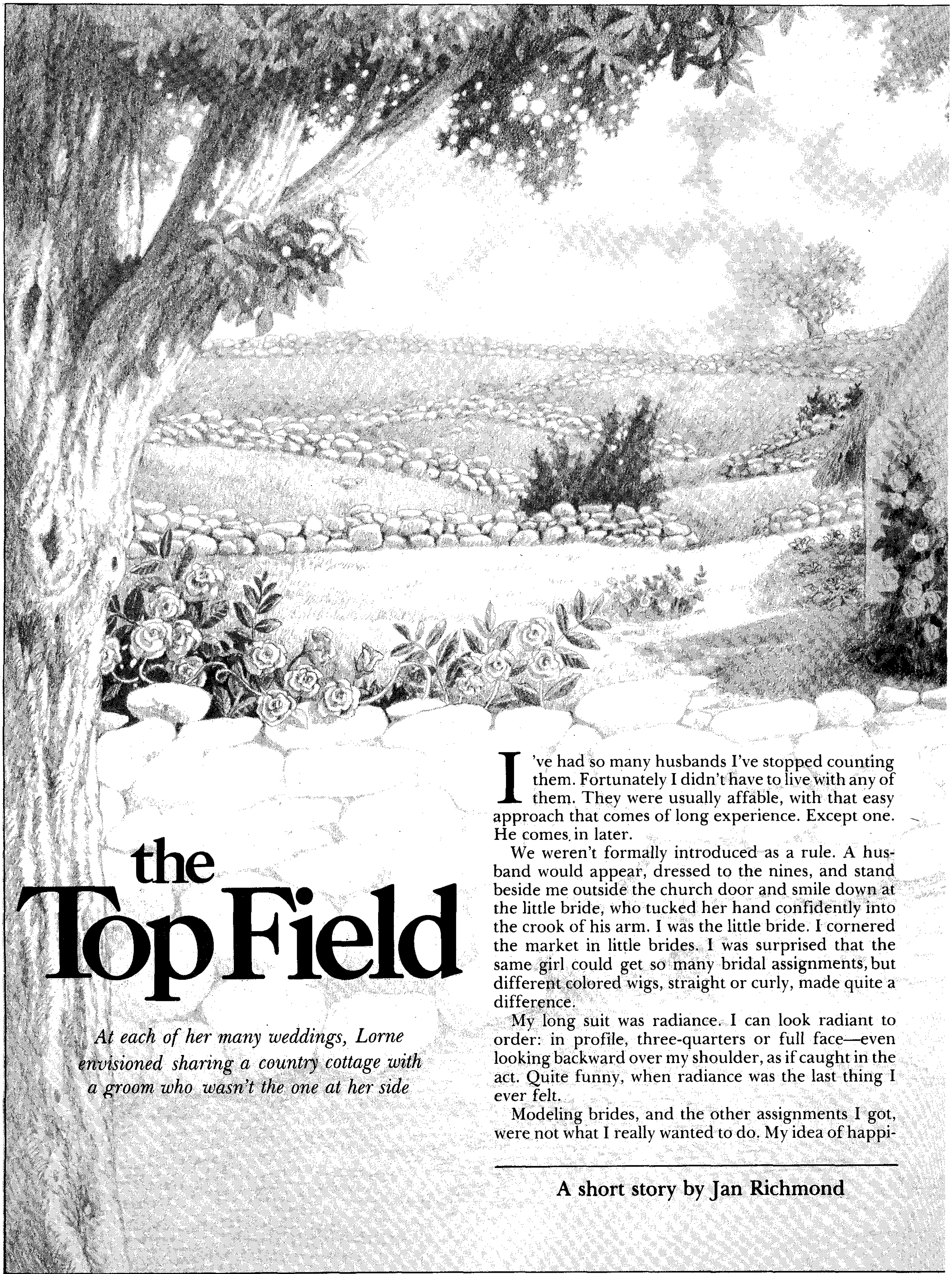
"Because he's the sort of person that he is."

I said, as calmly as I could, "Which is?"

My mother told me. John Stebbings was ambitious. He had overcome his background in Yorkshire. He had made, through nerve and a certain shrewd ruthlessness, a lot of money. He was not married, but it was well known in the city that he had a girlfriend as single-minded as himself, and everybody who knew them agreed that they made a good pair. "She has a chain of dress shops, I think—"

I imagined the woman, cool and slender as a blade of grass, always immaculate. She would never be stuck for conversation. She would never be made

(Continued on page 63)



the Top Field

At each of her many weddings, Lorne envisioned sharing a country cottage with a groom who wasn't the one at her side

I've had so many husbands I've stopped counting them. Fortunately I didn't have to live with any of them. They were usually affable, with that easy approach that comes of long experience. Except one. He comes in later.

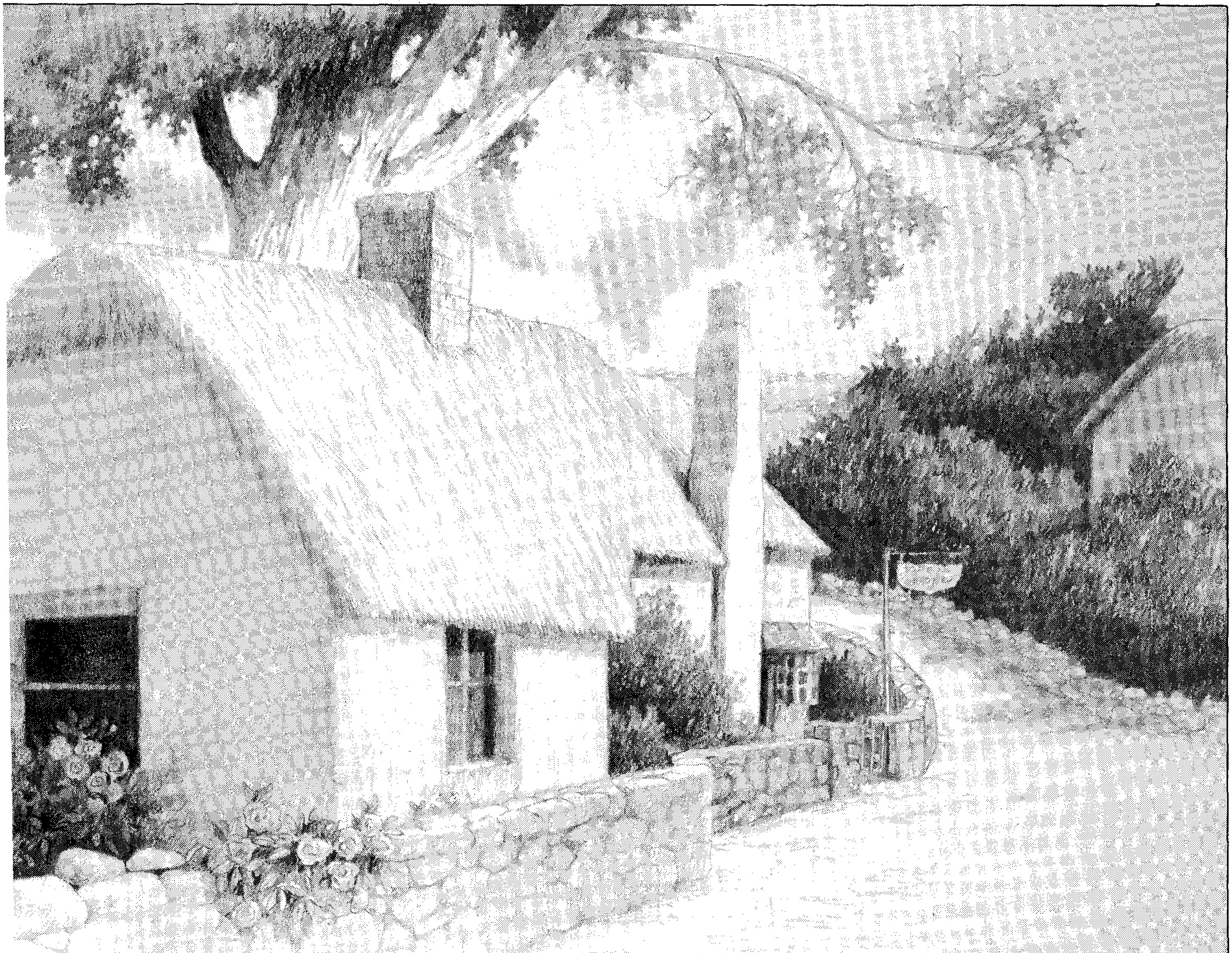
We weren't formally introduced as a rule. A husband would appear, dressed to the nines, and stand beside me outside the church door and smile down at the little bride, who tucked her hand confidently into the crook of his arm. I was the little bride. I cornered the market in little brides. I was surprised that the same girl could get so many bridal assignments, but different colored wigs, straight or curly, made quite a difference.

My long suit was radiance. I can look radiant to order: in profile, three-quarters or full face—even looking backward over my shoulder, as if caught in the act. Quite funny, when radiance was the last thing I ever felt.

Modeling brides, and the other assignments I got, were not what I really wanted to do. My idea of happi-

A short story by Jan Richmond

Illustrated by Ruth Sanderson



ness was Oakapple, a village where my Aunt Kate and her consort, Uncle Jamie, kept the village shop.

Uncle Jamie was an obsessive gardener. If it hadn't been for that garden behind the shop, which he had made from scratch, I was sure they would have sold out and gone to Australia to be near their daughter, who had married a farmer there. I had always loved going to Oakapple for a week during the school holidays. I took to the customers and the talk of births, deaths and marriages as if I'd been born and bred in the place.

"You're a country girl at heart," Aunt Kate would say, and it was true.

When I left school at seventeen, I told my mother I wanted to go and work for Aunt Kate, who I knew would be glad to have an extra pair of hands. My mother thought differently.

"Bury yourself in a small village? What on earth would you find to do in the evenings? It's a dead end."

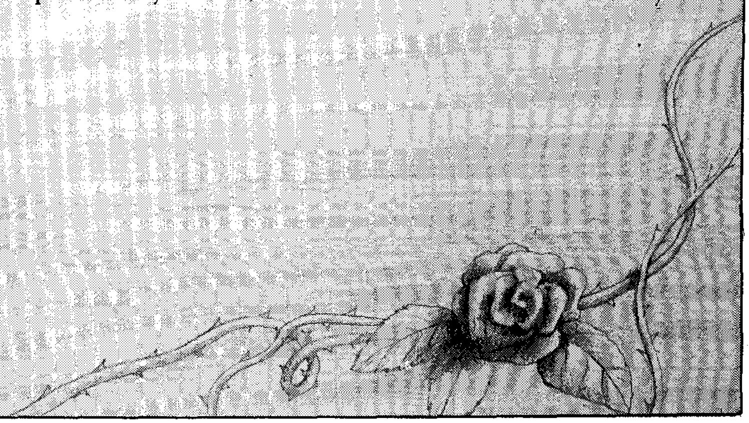
I'd never found it a dead end. There were gymnastic meets, car rallies, amateur dramatics and choirs. You get to know people in a village. I tried to tell Mother all this, but she only snorted.

"Don't be silly. You should have the kind of job in London where you meet people who matter. Girls from the top families go in for modeling nowadays. Now what about that? You'd be asked to parties."

"Where I'd presumably meet rich husbands, an assortment of them, that is," I murmured, knowing how Mother's mind worked.

"You've got a good figure and you're photogenic." She would not give up the pursuit. "I'm going to enter you at one of the best modeling schools. But, of course, you must do as you like."

You never did do as you liked with Mother. There's such a thing as emotional blackmail. If I became difficult, her eyes would go to the photograph on the piano—my father, who had died when I was a baby.



Nothing was ever said. It was just a heartrending little glance clearly saying, "You know I've tried to do my best, John."

Inevitably, I found myself in modeling school. Mother had always had a yen to be a model when she was my age, but her mother had insisted on a secretarial course.

Assignments seemed to come my way easily, and while I had worked at a variety of jobs, I seemed to be a natural for the role of a bride.

On one never-to-be-forgotten Saturday I was joined at the church door by a husband who was better looking, in a Robert Redfordish kind of way, than the general run of husbands. He was immaculate in the usual outfit. The sun was having a siesta behind a bank of clouds. While the cameraman waited for the right shaft of sunshine, my groom strolled over to some bushes that edged the path and began examining them closely. They struck me as very nondescript bushes, and I was offended. He might be bored, but all my other husbands had at least made an effort to carry on a little light conversation when we were held up by insufficient light.

The sun came out, he returned at the cameraman's shout, crooked his arm and gave me a little mechanical smile. I slipped my hand through his arm and looked radiant. The cameraman presently shouted, "Cut!" and we relaxed, thankfully on my part. My radiance was wearing a little thin. My groom straightened himself.

"I'm going to ask for a bigger fee," he said. "I've got a crick in my neck from waiting. I don't know what I'm doing it for, anyway."

"If you feel like that what *are* you doing it for?" I asked.

"The money," he said crisply. "I'm saving. Hard."

What for? A new car? Deposit on a mortgage? I really wasn't interested enough to ask. After the camera session, not-quite-Robert Redford and I nodded goodby and I returned to the apartment I shared with two girls. I packed the wedding-garment—a frilly affair with a frightful frill-edged veil to match—to go back to the boutique it came from. I telephoned Aunt Kate at Oakapple. Could I come down for the day tomorrow, Sunday? I could. Jamie would meet the train. I'd spent the previous Sunday with my mother, who no longer tried to run my life; she was making quite a new life of her own working in a public relations firm. Now that we didn't live together any more, we had become quite fond of each other. But Oakapple was where my heart was.

Next morning I took the train to the Halt, which was Oakapple's nearest station. There was Uncle Jamie, brown and balding, waiting for me. We drove through winding lanes, past familiar tiled and thatched cottages. It was like coming home. Aunt Kate greeted me with her usual affectionate hug. She was thin and wiry, with humorous eyes and the friendliest face under the sun. My father had been her brother and whenever I saw her I thought of my father's photograph.

"Jamie will talk your head off, I warn you," she said."The top field has come on the market and he's buying it."

I'd been hearing about the top field for a year and more; it lay beyond the garden and had never been ploughed. When Uncle Jamie came into the kitchen with a basket of newly picked peas, he started at once to talk about the field. How he would be able to experiment with all kinds of unusual vegetables. I sat at the table with Aunt Kate, podding peas. It was delightful to listen to his enthusiastic plans. Then they told me about the bigger farm Betty's husband had bought near a growing settlement in Victoria. I remembered my cousin as a jolly girl, just right for a farmer's wife. She was living the kind of life they understood and had married a man who, like themselves, found his deepest satisfaction in growing things.

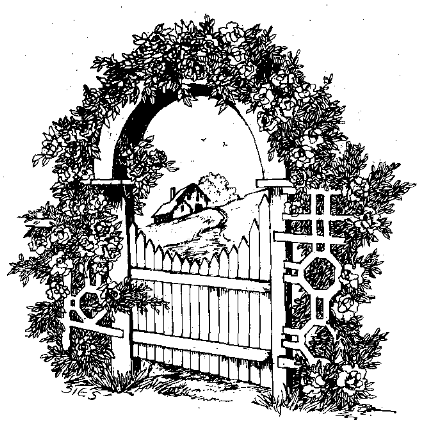
All too soon it was time to go. Aunt Kate was conscience-stricken. "We haven't even asked about all your doings and the people you've been meeting."

"There's not much to tell," I said. "I've been much married, as usual."

"To anybody interesting?"

I shook my head. "Not really. But we never get a chance to find out."

And for some unfathomable reason I thought of a tall, Robert Redfordish character strolling away to examine a scrubby row of bushes along a church path. To get away from me? What did I care?



It was a busy month. One day I was sent to a department store on an early closing day. This time I would be photographed in the act of making an enormous bed and looking overworked, while a male model offered me a fitted sheet. Then I would put this on the bed and immediately look radiant for the cameras.

The male model wore a conventional suit and tie. We nodded politely but hardly looked at each other. Then we did a double take and looked again.

"Hi," he said. "We've met before. Weren't you once a bride of mine?"

I nodded. He looked different without the top hat, but the face was unmistakable.

"How is your bankbook getting along?" I asked.

He looked really pleased.

"Imagine you remembering," he said.

"Imagine *you* remembering," I returned.

"The face is the same. I wondered what you looked like without that frilly lace curtain on your head."

Now this did surprise me. He had actually noticed my face.

I was shunted round the vast bed and the session began. By the time it was over, an hour later, I was ready to fling myself on to the bed for a well-earned rest. At the door of the department, my model partner waited for me.

"It's nice meeting you again," he said. "Come and have some tea. I'll be at the employees' entrance in five minutes."

I slipped on a coat and was there when he appeared. He wore jeans and a pullover and looked entirely and completely different from the formal stranger who had crooked his elbow for me outside the church door. He carried his other gear in a canvas bag slung over one shoulder and we went off in search of tea. We stopped at a sandwich bar, where we found a table in a corner and sat opposite each other. He had brown hair, a strong face and direct brown eyes. I saw that he was examining me too.

"You're so different," he said. "Wait a minute—I seem to remember red hair shining through that lace curtain over your head."

"That was a wig."

"And is the dark curly mop you have

(Continued on page 65)

Lace for Milady

Illustrated by Franco Accornero

BY JOAN SMITH

A
CAMEO
NOVEL

Lace for Milady

I am Priscilla Denver. No one has dared to call me Prissie since I was ten. I am now twenty-five years old. I am also unmarried and do not blush to acknowledge the fact. I was born in the year of Our Lord 1788 in Wiltshire, and it is surely one of the more pleasant corners anywhere, with a pleasing variety of meadows, fertile valleys, scattered forests, and streams. I was a healthy, normal child, less beautiful than some, and more intelligent than others. At twenty-one I received an offer of marriage from an eligible gentleman whose name I shall suppress since he is now married to another. He had a tendency to loll about and discuss love as though it were a tangible thing. Also he smoked cigars and did not have his jackets aired afterwards.To this day mention of his name suggests the lingering, sour smell of stale cigar smoke to me.

My father was a scholar, a professor of Greek at Oxford. Mama and I remained at home in our cozy cottage at Runnymede, where Papa always joined us for the summer and added to my knowledge by leaving his texts lying about. I was amused by the stories of Electra, Andromeda and other Grecian ladies of antiquity, and amazed that grown men—supposedly intelligent ones—wasted their time reading such trash.

Papa died when I was nineteen, and it made very little difference in our lives except for the summer, when he didn't come home. When I was twenty-one Mama remarried, choosing a well-to-do retired judge from the city. Mama was only forty herself and still handsome, Mr. Higgins considerably older. I did not actively dislike him but Mama died in the second year of that marriage in childbirth. Mr. Higgins was brokenhearted. The child did not survive; it would have been a boy. Nor did the father live much longer. He drank himself to death, quite literally. He was not sober from the day Mama died. I was twenty-four when he died, and I found myself an heiress. Mr. Higgins designated me as his sole heir, the possessor of one hundred thousand pounds. I was quite simply delighted. I never thought I would be rich but knew there were great advantages in such a condition.

I have said Papa was a professor of Greek. What I did not mention is that he married above him. He and Mama met at the time Papa was hired as a tutor to her cousin. Mama was a Devonmoore, claiming kinship to *the* Devonmoores of East Sussex. She was not dramatically cut off by her family, but she drifted away from them after her marriage to Papa. She could not continue in her exalted style of living and was too proud to visit her relations in a rented carriage so she did not visit at all, but for years she wrote endless letters to them. After a time, however, her correspondents had thinned to her older sister Ethelberta.

With a fortune now at my back, I decided to institute a personal relationship with Mama's and my relations. I chose, of course, her most faithful and lasting correspondent, Ethelberta. I wrote first of Mama's death, and again of my stepfather's. My aunt replied to both, in the second letter enquiring whether I was "adequately provided for." When she heard by return post just how adequately provided for I was, she immediately asked me to visit her. She had a son in his thirtieth year, unmarried and unhandsome, but I do not say that is why she asked me. Neither do I say it is not.

My Aunt Ethelberta proved to be a snob. She is a snob about genealogy. She refers to it plainly and somewhat gruesomely as "blood." I am an intellectual snob. I like my friends to have accomplishments beyond gossiping and plying their needle. My aunt had married "up" as surely as Mama had married "down." She is Lady Inglewood, widow of Lord Inglewood, first Baron Inglewood, who won a title from that dissipated old dandy, the Prince of Wales, in a game of faro. Actually, he won ten thousand pounds, but with the Prince's chronic state of financial embarrassment, he was willing to settle for a title. I learned this from her son

Adapted from Lace for Milady by Joan Smith. Copyright © 1980 by Joan Smith. To be published by Walker and Company and Fawcett Books.

George, but my aunt contends the title was given for some extraordinary service, long since forgotten, to the Prince. I think with a little haggling Lord Inglewood might have been the Earl of Inglewood, but he was himself not socially ambitious, I believe. He should have let his wife do the bargaining for him.

Lord Inglewood may have left his widow a Lady, but he also left her with a home mortgaged to the hilt, which meant that it was clearly incumbent upon his son George to make an advantageous match. It was equally clear that George's mama had the ill-conceived idea that I was the well-endowed virgin to be so honored. I was polite for six days, for I did not wish to break with the most elevated member of my family, but when she put the thing into words on the seventh day of my visit, my politeness came to an end.

She said, "You are not young, not pretty, and not well-connected, except for myself, Priscilla. I think it would be greatly to your advantage to marry Lord Inglewood." So fond was she of the title that she referred to both her late husband and her living son as Lord Inglewood.

"I see no advantage in marrying a penniless cousin I have hardly known a week," I replied quite frankly.

"Penniless! You forget he is Lord Inglewood, Priscilla. Inglewood belongs to him."

"I do not forget it." I abstained from mentioning the impossibility of doing so, with the title constantly ringing in my ears. "But if I am not mistaken, the estate belongs largely to the mortgage lenders."

"You have money, and little enough else, I might tell you. Your father a *teacher!* Really, how Andrea could be so foolish. It is an excellent match in every way, advantages to be gained on both sides. The ages just right, and George is very fond of you."

George, like his papa, is fonder of a wine bottle than of any woman alive. While he did not actively dislike me, so far as I could tell, I expect he would do exactly as his mother told him. As far as my aunt's opinion of *my* assets, I may not be a pretty woman. I am above average height, five-feet six-inches tall, have an athletic build, brown hair and brown eyes. My teeth are—well, excellent. I am fastidious about them.

There was more discussion between my aunt and me on the subject of George, which neither of us allowed to grow into an irreconcilable difference.

Finally, I expressed my intention of leaving. Of leaving her roof, that is, but not the neighborhood. I had become fascinated by the ocean. I don't know why I was so drawn to it. Perhaps, it was the ever-moving, ever-changing pattern of the waves that inspired me to think and dream. I hadn't had my fill of it yet, and I would stay in Sussex.

My aunt required money; I required a roof over my head. We were both practical women and we agreed that I would rent the Dower House, standing empty and profitless, for five hundred pounds per annum. It is a very fine home built of gray stone in the Gothic style, with four lancet windows on either side of the handsome oak double doors. It has ornamental flying buttresses, finials, gargoyles, and all the customary trappings of a Gothic building. I had a quite irrational desire to live in an old Gothic mansion, and now that I had independence, I would do so.

Unfortunately, Dower House cost me a portion of that independence for I fell in love with it. My emotions, unmoved throughout the years by mere human flesh, succumbed to a passion for wood and stone and mortar. I wanted it for my own, and offered to buy it. My aunt accepted my offer, but not before she pushed me up to a very good price. In fact, she behaved criminally, in my opinion, but was crafty enough to do it legally. She purposely misrepresented the Dower House to me as an ancient home. I subsequently learned it was less than one hundred years old. She also grossly misrepresented other things. Her deceptions were many and for weeks we remained in a state of perpetual warfare but between battles my aunt did help Slack and me in various ways, so that a sort of superficial peace reigned between us. We visited back and forth, and in her mind the wish was still alive that George might marry my fortune.

Slack's my companion and has been my faithful friend forever. All through my childhood in Wiltshire she was my nanny, governess, and maid. She was somehow related to Papa and came to his home when I was born to lend a hand. She never left it, and I trust she will never leave me. She is honest, bossy, overbearing, short-tempered, clever, and twice my age. She has black hair and one black eyebrow that runs across her forehead like a narrow velvet ribbon. Her eyes are gray and as sharp as a lynx's; her nose is sharp, as is her tongue.

Along with renovating and purchasing for Dower House, I also bought material for two new gowns, to suit my new status as a homeowner and occasional hostess. I had been in mourning for over five years all told, with the deaths of Papa, Mama, and Mr. Higgins, and I was eager to get out of it. It was six months since the death of Mr. Higgins and time to shed mourning entirely.

"Tawdry," Slack told me bluntly when I got home with my gold-striped lutestring and my green Italian silk.

"You might have mentioned it when we were in the shop," I replied in the same tone.

"And announced to the town your stepfather is still warm in his grave? I wished to save at least a semblance of decency, since it seems we are to live here." Slack was not yet completely resigned to our permanent move to Sussex.

"Very clever. I doubt anyone here knows a thing about me but that I am an heiress. Lady Inglewood would not have told anyone I am in mourning for it was—and is—her intention to see me a bride within a month. I am mighty tired of decking myself out like a carrion crow, Slack, and mean to get into some colors before I am too old."

My aunt, or Lady Ing, as Slack and I took to calling her, is short but appears tall. She has a truly hideous, brindled shade of brownish-red hair that she wears in a complicated arrangement of loops and swirls. With this awful mop she chooses purple and bile-green gowns. Her dark eyes are close-set above a sharp nose and she walks with short, quick steps that are jerky and unbecoming. All of this unattractive appearance is forgotten when she gets on top of her mount. She is an accomplished horsewoman, an accomplishment I admire but do not envy. Quite naturally, I approached my aunt on the subject of buying a horse.

"I'll sell you Juliette," she said at once. Juliette was her own mount, a high-bred mare, really very handsome, indeed, a bay. I had often seen the two of them going across the park or down the road, and when I thought of riding, I thought of myself riding something akin to Juliette.

"What will you ride yourself?" I asked her.

"I am reaching the age where I must give it up. I have a little twinge of pain in my elbows that is worse after riding." She looked still young enough and spry enough to ride for ten years, but I did not question her.

"Very well. What price do you want for her?"

"One hundred and fifty pounds."

We settled for one hundred—my top price—but she got the better part of the fifty pounds out of me by adding an extra charge for saddle, blankets, curry brushes and other objects. As Juliette was no gift horse, I did not hesitate to look her thoroughly in the mouth, legs, chest, and eyes. I did not intend to repeat the beating I had taken on my house. I could not wait to try my skill and went to the stable right away to do so. With the help of a groom, a block of wood, and strong arms, I contrived to get myself hoisted aloft.

I am not chicken-hearted, but I confess that when I first looked down I felt a quiver of apprehension. I grabbed the reins awkwardly, and they seemed but a poor way of holding myself on the animal's back. To hang onto my seat, I put one hand in Juliette's mane. She did not appear to object. This felt a little safer, and I led Juliette out of the stable. The ground ceased whirling under me after two slow walks around the garden, and I decided to let her out a little. The groom told me to give her a little kick with my heel. I did and she walked faster but not dangerously fast. The land between Lady Ing's house and mine was comprised of a meadow and a garden. I required, or at least desired, the concealing privacy of a few trees for my first ride, so I went off into the thicket that did not belong to her. It belonged to the Duke of Clavering, my neighbor on the other side, and was a part of Belview, his estate. He had a reputation for liking his privacy very well, but as he was known to be in London, I had no fear of discovery.

The ride proceeded satisfactorily. Eventually I even let go of Juliette's mane and held myself on by the reins alone. I became eager to try something more daring and I kicked Juliette's side, and she broke into a trot. The smoothness of the walk was disrupted, and I grabbed her mane again. As I lurched forward to do so, my heel inadvertently touched Juliette's side once more. The silly animal thought I wished to go faster. I was positively flopping in the saddle now, and becoming quite frightened. The saddle began slipping so that I was virtually hanging off Juliette's left side. This so unnerved the animal that she took to going faster and faster. I decided to fall off before I got trampled under her hooves, and let go, rolling in the damp earth of the thicket. I did not break any bones, fortunately, but I wrenched my left knee rather badly. My pride suffered more, and I was thankful I had taken my first lesson and inevitable tumble in privacy.

It soon dawned on me that my disgrace would not be kept to myself. Juliette, the perverse animal, did not stop. I had the sinking realization that she would eventually go back to her stall at Inglewood. Her hooves were thundering in the distance, then a cry rang out.

It was a man shouting, "Hey Julie, whoa Julie." The Duke of Clavering's game warden must have been in the thicket and I was glad he would retrieve the animal for me before it bolted back to its former owner.

"Here. Bring her here." I shouted, and tried to arise. My knee gave a sharp stab of pain, and I sank to the ground again. I was embarrassed to be crouching there helplessly but in roughly two minutes the game warden found me. He looked no better than a game warden should look: large, brawny, and outfitted in an indifferent blue jacket and buckskins. His hair was black and his face swarthy; the eyes, too, were dark. He might have been a gypsy.

"Took a tumble, did you?" he asked, with a somewhat superior smile on his face. Having no manners, he remained in his saddle, holding Juliette's reins.

"Certainly not. I merely decided to dismount, for Juliette was going faster than I liked."

"Dismount? Ah, is that what the ladies call falling off a horse nowadays? Next time you wish to slacken the pace, I suggest you pull on the reins, slowly and evenly." He smiled on me condescendingly.

"Next time you discover a lady stretched out on the ground, I suggest you dismount and help her up instead of delivering a quite unnecessary lecture," I replied tartly, and picked myself up. I took a step toward Juliette; my knee buckled under me, and I stumbled.

That, finally, was sufficient to get him down from his animal. It also widened the grin on his face. "I'll toss you up," he said, and then did precisely that.

He placed both hands around my waist and lifted me as though I were an elf. By making a wild lunge at mane and reins, I managed to get on Juliette's back. The trouble, or part of it, was immediately made clear. The saddle was buckled on so loosely that the lurching movement drew it around one hundred and eighty degrees when I pulled on the pommel, and I was once again on the ground, holding my temper at this stupid man.

"Thank you very much indeed!" I said, and arose, though my knee still ached.

"I take it this is your maiden ride?" he said with a broad grin.

"As you so cleverly deduce, it is my maiden ride."

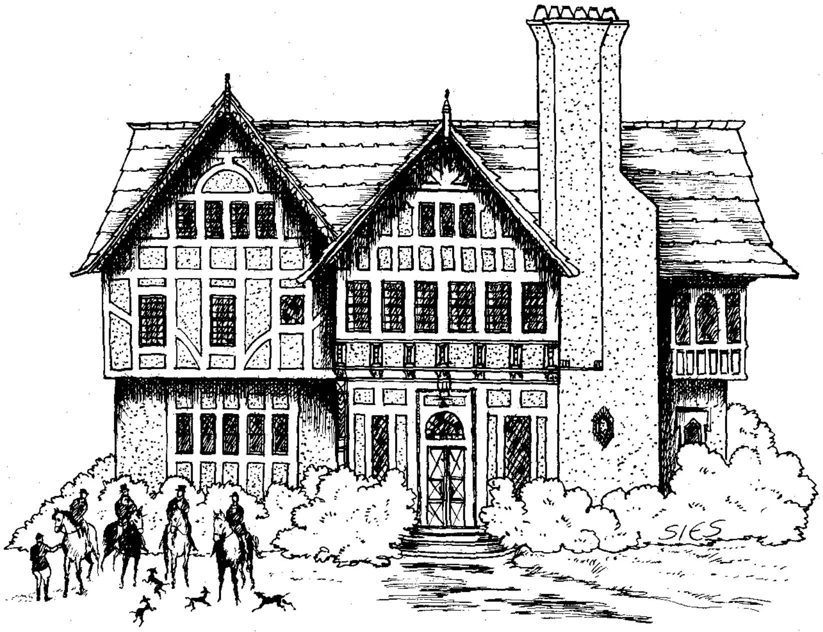
"Lesson number one: Always check to see the girth is buckled on tightly. Lesson number two: Don't clutch at the reins as though they were the handle of your handbag. They are held thus." He reached to his own reins and wound them through his fingers in a quite complicated and uncomfortable-looking manner. "Their purpose is *not* to hold you on, but merely to direct the animal."

I feigned deafness, grabbing the reins. "I'll bear it in mind," I said, then began walking home. Not for fifty pounds would I have got on that animal's back again in front of anyone.

"If you don't do it now, you never will," he said, apparently reading my mind. "Here, let me tighten her girth for you. You can't walk back all the way with that game leg."

"I am not a horse, sir. I do not have a game leg, or a swollen fetlock. I have wrenched my knee, and I shall walk home."

"Suit yourself," he answered with the utmost indifference; then putting one toe in the stirrup, he threw the other



leg over his horse's back with the greatest of ease, then started walking along after me.

"I don't require an escort, thank you."

"You will require further assistance before you've gone much farther."

"I haven't far to go."

"You have over a mile."

I couldn't believe it was so far till I had been walking—limping really—for ten minutes. The man then suggested forcefully that I try riding again. He tightened the beast's saddle, and once again tossed me up. "I'll hold her reins and walk if you're afraid," he offered.

This offer was spurned, but I took care to keep Juliette's pace to a strict walk, which was very uncomfortable because it meant holding my feet well out from her sides. Before we had gone much farther, the back of Dower House was visible over the thinning trees. I was never so glad to see a pile of rocks in my life.

"I'll see you in," the man said when we got to the stable.

"That is really not at all necessary."

"I want to talk to you," he said, in an authoritative voice that I suddenly realized was cultured. I had been too upset before to notice.

"Who are you?"

"Clavering. Your neighbor on the east."

"The Duke of Clavering?" I asked, quite simply astonished.

"At your service, whenever you care to take a tumble, ma'am," he answered, and offered me his arm.

"I thought you were in London."

"I was. I returned. Shall we go?"

I couldn't think of a sensible word to say. I went immediately to my room to clean up, asking Slack to get His Grace a glass of wine. When I joined them, he seemed quite at home with Slack. She, however—never completely at home with any male over the age of ten—was looking grim.

"What was it you wished to speak to me about?" I asked.

"About Seaview," he replied.

"And what might Seaview be?" I asked.

"This—the Dower House," Slack informed me.

"Oh, you mean it already has a name. I had rather looked forward to naming it myself. I had thought of Hillcrest."

"Your neighbor down the road had the same notion. The McCurdys call their place Hillcrest. The hill actually crests there. You have a view of the sea; we called it Seaview."

"*We*?" I asked, with perhaps a touch of condescension, or so Slack told me later.

"It was named by my great-grandfather, since he built it," Clavering said in the same possessive tone.

"I see. I hadn't realized that," I answered, pretending no more than a decent modicum of interest.

"Did Lady Inglewood not tell you so when she sold you the place?"

"No, apparently she did not consider it of sufficient importance."

"But she told you about the leased land?"

"What leased land?" I was beginning to seethe silently at Lady Ing's deceit. Something in his triumphant, gloating expression made me expect trouble ahead.

"The land on which Seaview stands," he answered, relishing his victory.

"No, no, I bought the land outright from her. It is a very small piece, but it is not leased."

"It was not hers to sell."

"What do you mean? What are you telling me?" I demanded, incredulous.

"What I can scarcely believe you do not know already. Seaview stands on land leased from me."

"But—but I don't understand. How can this be? She couldn't sell me a house without land for it to stand on. Slack, get the ownership papers."

Slack, nearly as upset as I, bustled from the room in a swirl of black skirts.

"Just how did such a state of affairs come about?" I asked the Duke. "You said your ancestors built the place. How does it come to be out of your hands?"

He looked inordinately pleased at the tizzy into which he had thrown me, and I resolved to show less of my concern. He answered blandly, "My great-grandfather built the place for his sister-in-law, who was a Tilbridge. She was an invalid and required a place by the sea. The solarium was built for her. Miss Tilbridge left the place to a niece, and eventually it fell into Lady Inglewood's family, which is connected slightly to mine through marriage. But my family never lets land go irrecoverably out of our hands, and at the end of ninety-nine years the land is to revert to Claverings."

"How many years of the lease are up?" I asked. I thought from his wily smile he was about to say ninety-eight, but it wasn't quite that desperate.

"Eighty," he said.

It was a frightful blow. That my aunt would play such a low, underhanded trick was bad enough; that I who prided myself a little on my intelligence should be such an easy dupe was worse; but the most severe blow, of course, was that I didn't own the land on which my house stood.

Slack returned with the papers.

"If you will permit me," Clavering said, and held out a peremptory hand. He turned the papers over to the last page, and there were the accursed words. *"The property held in lease by the Duke of Clavering till January 1, A.D. 1832, at which time it reverts to his sole ownership and discretion."*

He held the page in one hand and pointed out the relevant passage with a surprisingly well-shaped finger of the other. On his small finger of the pointing hand was a heavy gold ring, catching the glow from the sun in a large emerald. When I think, still, of my poor leased land, I think of that pointing finger, like a finger of fate, and the green stone winking somberly in the sun.

"Do you mean to say that that—woman sold me a house that has no land to go with it?" I cried.

"It certainly seems you made the error of buying a house that stands on land belonging to me," he agreed with a suppressed smirk. "Tell me, was the purchase, like your ride, a first?"

"Yes, and I took a fall, but this is not the end of it."

He lifted the documents from my fingers. I had snatched them back from him, but he now scanned the papers casually. "Everything here is in order. What do you hope to do about it?"

"Wring her neck," I said grimly.

"That will help cool your anger, but little else. I have a more practical suggestion—sell Seaview to me."

"No!" The response was instinctive. It came out without thought or effort on my part. I loved my old sham Gothic mansion. I liked the view of the sea, and I had no desire to leave Sussex.

"I know you paid too much for the place, but I am willing to purchase it from you at the same price," he said reasonably.

"How do you know what I paid for it?" I asked. It seemed the Duke knew a great deal more about me than I knew about him.

"I took the trouble to find out. Three thousand pounds, was it not?"

"Yes, it was, and I do not consider it excessive."

"Considering the unusual circumstance of the leased land, I doubt she would have found many takers, but of course you know what it is worth to you to live for nineteen years in a draughty, uncomfortable, decrepit old house."

Every instinct demanded a rude reply to this speech, but it was my desire to ingratiate the Duke to get him to renew the lease for another ninety-nine years, so I held in my anger. "Surely another lease can be arranged. . ." I began placatingly.

"I think not."

"You have no need of it! Belview is huge." I had actually seen no more than a tantalizing hint or two from behind the wooded park. A branch of beech would sway to reveal a crenellated edge of roof standing against the sky, or a glimpse of a turret or bartizan swelling out from a corner.

"I do not require it for myself, but I require it."

"What for?"

The black brows rose perceptibly, and a spark of anger lit his dark eyes. He suddenly looked more duke than gypsy. At length he replied unhelpfully, "For a relative."

"It is said that Belview has fifty bedrooms. I can't think one of them could not house your relative."

Again there was a pause; then he decided to humor me with an answer. "Sixty actually, but my aunt is ill—lung trouble—and requires sea air without the inconvenience of a large house. Seaview is closer to the sea than I am, and it has the solarium."

"It isn't that much closer, and as to the solarium it is very uncomfortable. We never use it."

"You are not invalids. My aunt would use it."

"She will not use it for nineteen years, sir. By that time I trust she will be either recovered to health or dead."

"Suit yourself. I thought any *intelligent* person would be happy to extricate herself from such a bad bargain."

"I don't want to extricate myself, as you put it."

Again the smile in that maddening, superior way. "You might think otherwise when it is discovered in Pevensey how Lady Inglewood cheated you," he said, trying a new tack.

"I don't care what anyone thinks of me."

"I thought otherwise. Your quite foolish, and really very dangerous maiden ride in a wild thicket without a groom to help you led me to believe you preferred to keep your blunders to yourself. You should *never* take your first ride alone, just in case you should dismount precipitately—and hurt your knee."

"I did not dismount precipitately."

"You did not dismount at all, madam. The word denotes some choice in the matter. You fell, due to your unique method of buckling the girth loosely. And you would do better to get yourself a tame mount rather than tackling that spitfire Lady Inglewood keeps. I'm surprised she would let you out on such a spirited mount."

"She has nothing to say about what I ride. Juliette is my horse."

"Good God! Gulled again," he said and went off into a series of ill-bred chuckles. He arose, still laughing. "I see you will be extremely easy to deal with. You will *buy* anything, and I have some hope that you will also *sell* me Seaview before many days are out. Good day, ma'am." He executed two abbreviated bows toward Slack and myself and left.

"I never met such an insufferably rude man in my life," I said to Slack.

"Sell it," she replied.

"Sell Hillcrest! I wouldn't sell it for the world."

"You never called it Hillcrest before today, and it is foolish to start doing so now, only because the Duke says it is called Seaview. He is nasty to be sure, and not to be trusted any more than any other man, but still he offered a fair bargain, and I'm surprised you didn't leap at it."

"Why should he want this little place when he owns a monstrous house and half the land between here and Dover? No, Slack, there is something afoot here, and I mean to find out what it is."

My next move was to go storming over to Lady Inglewood's and give her the sharp edge of my tongue. She was very civil, as she always is when she has won a point and knows very well she has been dishonest.

"Oh, my dear, you are limping. I hope you didn't take a spill from Juliette."

She wore bile green today, draped to reveal the layer of fat that encircled her waist like a cincture.

"No, I twisted my knee coming down the stairs. The corner of the carpet at the bottom of the stairs is loose, but I shall have it repaired." Slack scowled at me, for she is a demon for honesty. "I like Juliette very much. I have had my first ride, and we got on famously."

She looked unconvinced, and so, of course, knew very well she had sold me a mount much too frisky for my nonexistent skills, but it was the leased land I had come to argue about and was not to be diverted by a trifle. "I have had a call from the Duke of Clavering," I said.

"So unpleasant for you," was her commiserating reply.

"Unpleasant in the extreme, to discover my land is not my own."

"Oh, you refer to the leased land. But of course that is all in the papers. I made no effort to conceal it. No one would sign such an important document without reading it all."

"You never mentioned a word of it!"

"You never asked."

"I never asked if the house were yours to sell either. I assumed that when my *own aunt* . . . "

"We discussed, I believe, the matter of Dower House not being entailed with the estate but my own personal property."

This was her line, and she stuck to it buckle and thong. She let fall a few casual mentions of having consulted her lawyer on the matter, which I make no doubt she had done. "So it is all legal, and you must speak to Clavering on the matter. He will renew the lease, for a price."

"I have spoken to him. He won't renew it."

"Pshaw! Of course he will. What did you offer him?"

"I didn't offer him anything."

"Well, my dear, you can't expect something for nothing. Make him an offer. Say five hundred pounds for another ninety-nine years. See if he doesn't jump at it."

"No, he wants to buy the place from me."

"Does he indeed?" she asked with a light of interest in her eyes. "Did he mention a price?"

"Yes, he offered me the price I paid for it, though, of course, he found it very high, considering the leased land," I added with a glare.

"Well, there you are, then. If you dislike the bargain we made, you can be out of it easily enough and no harm done."

This was so patently true that I found myself at a dead end. I could hardly complain about the deal when it could be undone with a word.

That evening I had a visit from my cousin George.

"I hear Clavering came to call," he said before he even took a seat.

"Yes, he called early this afternoon."

"Odd that he is at home. With autumn coming on he is usually in London. He is active in Parliament, you know."

"I didn't know," I replied.

"Oh, yes, very active, though I don't know exactly what it is he does. He is a Whig. But there has been a spot of trouble lately with the Gentlemen, and he might be here to look into that."

"This is Whig gentlemen you're talking about, is it, George?" said Slack.

"Lord, no. I mean the smugglers," he replied.

"Smugglers?" Slack gasped. I did not gasp. I had heard in town of local smuggling activities.

"What sort of trouble has there been?" I inquired.

"Caught a bunch of them red-handed. Clavering takes a dim view of smuggling. He'll speak to the magistrate and see they're dealt with severely."

"What has Clavering to say about it?"

"The Duke pretty well runs things hereabouts. He has the magistrates and all the politicians in his pocket. He is a law and order man," George went on. "Then, too, there were hunters caught on his lands lately, and that would annoy him no end."

"Anyone who owns the better part of a county must expect that," I said.

"Not Clavering. He's posted, and they oughtn't to have been on his land."

"What do you mean, posted?"

"Why, he's put his signs up. You must have seen them. Hunting is not allowed on private property if the owner posts signs. Otherwise, of course, those entitled to hunt may hunt anywhere. Game Laws," George explained, rather inadequately.

"Do you mean to tell me, George, that any man with a gun may go on any other man's property and shoot his game?"

"Certainly not! Only owners of land worth more than a hundred pounds a year, the eldest sons of squires or higher-placed persons, or lessees of land worth one hundred and fifty a year are allowed to hunt game."

"But they may do so *anywhere*? They could go on your land or mine and shoot our rabbits and we couldn't stop them?"

"Certainly you can run them off, but they are allowed to come on unless told otherwise."

"I never heard of such a thing in my life!" I declared. I first doubted George had the thing straight, but if there was one thing he did know, it was hunting. He would not have the wits to make up this information.

"The Act was passed in 1671 and is still in effect," he informed me. "If you don't want them on your land, of course, you can kill your own foxes, for it's mostly fox they shoot. But then if you kill your foxes, the rabbits breed like rabbits." He detected no humor in this comparison. "As for Belview, there'd be dandy shooting if it weren't for the traps."

"What sort of traps has he set?" I asked.

"Mantraps. He has the place littered with them. But he's posted, and there's nothing can be done. Clavering, after all."

It was sufficient. The Duke of Clavering could lay out mantraps to maim and kill innocent passers-by, and so long as he posted it, nothing could be done. This ruthlessness tallied very well with the opinion I held of the man.

"Why does he do it?" I asked George.

He shrugged his sloping shoulders. "Says it's to protect his ruins."

"What ruins are you talking about?" Slack asked, knowing I would phrase the question less politely.

"Some old falling-apart bit of a church or some such thing on his lands. It's supposed to be built on top of a Roman temple, and he wants to protect it. He collects rubbish found about his place—Roman rubbish."

"*Roman* rubbish? How would he find such ancient things?" I asked.

"This place is full of old Roman ruins. There must have been hundreds of Romans living here at one time. Clavering has a whole room full of broken jugs and whatnot. Likes them better than real ones. He can tell you to a year or two how old they are. The older they are, the better he likes them."

"He didn't look like a scholar to me," I said.

"Scholar? No such a thing. Just collects things, that's all. Has a Marine Room too, as he calls it, with glass cabinets full of shells."

"And is now taking up house collecting," I said stiffly. "The acquisitive instinct is strong in him."

Before George made any reply, the grate, and the mantelpiece over it, gave a great jump, as though the whole thing were about to fall through the floor.

"What on earth was that?" Slack shouted.

"Grate bumping," George replied. "Happens off and on. Took to bumping a few years ago and gives a good rattle every now and again. The house settling it could be."

"A house this old must be settled already. It wasn't that," I said.

"Well, it happens anyway. Nothing to worry about. Daresay you don't believe in ghosts, Priscilla?"

"I do not, but I believe in bumping grates, and I mean to discover the cause."

There was no fire in the grate, so I got down on my hands and knees and stuck my head up the flue, using a candle to give me a light. I saw a great deal of soot, some quantity of which brushed loose and landed on my hair, but I discovered nothing of interest. "I'll go down in the basement and have a look," I decided. "Perhaps George will accompany me."

George looked rather frightened but was not about to admit before two ladies that he was afraid of ghosts, and with an unsteady hand he took up a candelabrum and came with me.

I am not afraid of ghosts, nor the dark, nor of long shadows stretching along gloomy passages, but I am not entirely insensitive, and I admit the atmosphere was eerie. I could *almost* swear I heard voices behind the wall on which the grate was located. The grate is situated on the east wall, the wall that faces Belview. That particular wall is made of stone, beautifully cut, fitted, really a work of art. The other walls are of irregular stone, and on one side the wall is just plain dirt for the bottom two feet. There is no shaft going from grate to cellar, for easier cleaning of the ashes. The ashes have to be swept from the hearth abovestairs each day. This was a little inconvenient, but not unusual.

The stone wall was extremely solid. The trouble was not in this area, and George and I soon retreated up the stairs. Slack greeted us, trembling and pale. "I heard voices," she declared. "The place is *haunted,* Priscilla."

"Nonsense! You don't believe in ghosts, and neither do I. If you heard voices, you heard human voices. Mine and George's very likely."

"No, they were deep men's voices," she insisted.

"Come outside, George, and let us see if there is someone prowling about," I said to him.

"It might be the Gentlemen, you know," George said. "We have a saying hereabouts: 'Watch the wall, my darling.' Turn your head the other way and see and hear nothing when the Gentlemen are about. That way you will come to no harm. They don't like interfering with."

"Neither do *I* like interfering with my grate. Are you coming or not, George?" I took up a candle as I spoke, to show him I meant to go, alone if necessary.

"Yes, yes, I'll go with you, but we don't want a light. There's no thinking we can stop them, Priscilla. If we see anything, I'll nip into town and report it to the revenue officer."

I was not afraid but am not quite a fool either, I hope, and agreed to his plan. We went out the kitchen door, eased our way silently around the house to the front, and saw absolutely nothing.

The moon shone, an owl hooted hauntingly from some faraway tree, and in the distance the ocean lapped peacefully.

"Let us see if there are boats at the seaside," I suggested. The beach was totally deserted. In some mystification, and also some relief, we quickly returned home.

We had a glass of wine to calm our nerves, discussed the matter in the fruitless fashion in which mysteries must always be discussed, and finally George left. We went to bed with our heads full of smugglers, Slack to dream of them, I with a decision to find out from Officer Smith, our local revenueman, just how great a threat they constituted.

The next morning gave me a taste of how bleak and dreary it can be on the Atlantic coast in autumn. It was raining hard, gray sheets driven by a raucous gale from the ocean, causing the drops to slap the windowpanes with a driving force. No lesson on Juliette was possible today. I had determined I would have another, the knee notwithstanding. All plans for the day were cancelled perforce. Slack and I sat huddled before the grate in the Blue Salon, with our faces and fronts too hot from the flames and our backs chilled by the draughts from the windows. In midmorning we had candles lit to lighten the gloom. Really, it was remarkably uncomfortable. I half wished I had not rejected Clavering's offer out of hand. I held a book in my hands but did not read; Slack held her knitting and did not knit.

"The only thing to be said for this day is that George will not come to call," I said a little petulantly. No sooner were the words out of my mouth than the knocker sounded.

The caller proved not George, but an even less welcome one, the Duke of Clavering. I recognized his deep voice as he handed his coat and hat to the butler, saying, "Looks like autumn's here, eh?" in an abominably cheerful tone.

He must have moved swiftly, for before the butler could announce him he strode in, rubbing his hands together and smiling. "Good morning, ladies. Nice day."

We both surveyed him with hostility but, undaunted, he advanced to the fire and drew up a chair for himself between us. "How is the sprained knee?" he asked me.

"Sprained knee?" I inquired, as though the matter had slipped my mind.

"Yes, the spill you took from Juliette."

"I had forgotten all about it. My knee is fine, thank you."

"Good."

"In fact, I had been looking forward to another ride today, but the weather, of course, makes it impossible. I am surprised to find anyone out in such a gale."

"Autumn is here," he said. "This is typical fall weather on the coast. You will become inured to it if you stay."

"There is no question of my not staying."

"Ah, then you like the rain. That is good. We get a great deal of it."

"We always got a great deal of rain in Wiltshire," I replied.

"Of course, the winds here make the rain more unpleasant. A very driving rain we get, and cold."

"Particularly inclement weather for an invalid with lung trouble, I should think," I replied, letting him know I understood very well the direction of his talk. He was painting a glum picture to encourage me to sell.

"I hope the road isn't flooded with this downpour. It happens every spring. The road is always washed out for a month with the high tides and rain. This low-lying land you are situated on is the worst, of course."

"How nice! We shall have to set up a yacht, Slack. I always wanted to do some boating. We were landlocked at Wiltshire."

"You certainly must make some arrangement for the month or so you will be cut off."

"The spring is a long way off yet."

"Oh, yes, we are just getting into the bitter winter weather now. Half a year of wind and lashing rains ahead of us. I daresay your first month here gave you a very misleading picture of the place. In the summer months it is lively and pleasant on the coast, with all the visitors from London."

"I did not particularly enjoy the crowds of visitors. I look forward to the peace and quiet."

"Not much to do all winter long, of course. You will have read the two dozen books at the circulating library by then, and the assemblies in Pevensey are cancelled every winter."

"Have you had any trouble with smugglers at all?" he asked, to draw our attention to yet another coastal plague. No mild "Gentlemen" for him; he wanted to make them sound as bloodcurdling as possible.

"No. That is . . . " I stopped, and he looked up quickly with interest. I related the episode of the banging grate, making it a sort of interesting phenomenon, or joke.

"It sounds as though you've been visited by smugglers all right," he told us, with the greatest relish.

"I can't think so, unless they were phantom smugglers. There wasn't a sign of a boat on the beach."

"You weren't foolish enough to leave the house when they were around!" he shouted, as though it were only by the sheerest of luck I lived to tell it. "You never want to do that. It is courting disaster. Anyway, they wouldn't leave the stuff out in full view—or the boats either. It was probably landed some nights ago and has been stored on your property to be transferred later."

"They surely wouldn't be so bold as to hide it on my land."

"My dear Miss Denver, the smugglers are a law unto themselves, and if you are wise, you won't trouble them. They are very vicious."

"I shall report it to the revenue officer. I had planned to do so today, but the rain kept me home."

"What, this little shower? You must get used to that. It is nothing out of the ordinary. This is one of the better days we are likely to see before next spring."

"When the *floods* set in," I added. "I understand you very well, Your Grace. You are painting the most lugubrious picture possible to get me to change my mind about selling Hillcrest."

"Seaview."

"Hillcrest. It is *my* home, and I shall call it what I wish. I do not plan to leave. In fairness to your invalid aunt, I must tell you you had better find some other cold, windswept, flooded spot for her to recuperate in."

"Thirty-five hundred," he said. "I'll raise the price to thirty-five hundred. It is a better than fair offer. You won't match it elsewhere."

"I don't intend to sell."

"It's my top offer, and more than the place is worth."

"Why do you offer more than it's worth?"

"It's mine! This land has been in the family for five hundred years. Seaview is an integral part of my holdings. It was built by my great-grandfather with stone taken from Clavering land, a fallen chapel. The woodwork, the carved panelling, actually comes from Belview, done by Grinling Gibbons. It means a great deal to me."

"It means a great deal to me as well," I informed him, unimpressed.

"What can it possibly mean to you? You haven't been here over a month. The weather is bad, the smugglers will annoy you, you are cut off from society. There is nothing to recommend the place to any normal person."

"Why can't you understand I don't want to sell my house? You just want to set mantraps around Seaview, too, to keep anyone from disturbing your tranquility on those rare occasions when you are home."

"I meant to warn you about the mantraps. Lucky you didn't fall into one yesterday. It is the reason I came, to inform you of them."

"Very well, I am informed," I said, "and will stay out of your thicket."

"Actually the thicket is safe enough. It is the meadow just beyond that is particularly well trapped.

"It is because of the Roman ruins, you see. My family chapel was built over a Roman temple. I am toying with the idea of having it restored—many of the original stones are still there. The remainder were hauled off by some fellow who took the notion he would use them for a dry wall, hence the traps."

This unpleasant and obnoxious man was a duke, and I did wish to get my lease renewed; so at this point I inquired if he would take a glass of wine.

"The rain's letting up. I think I'd better be off," he replied.

"Letting up so soon, is it? I thought that, as in the Bible, we could expect forty days and forty nights of uninterrupted downpour. I had half decided to commission an ark and start collecting pairs of the local fauna."

"Come the deluge, you are welcome to a berth on my yacht, Miss Denver. I wouldn't want to set sail without the female of my own species." He lifted a heavy black brow and arose. "A delightful visit. May I return?"

"Certainly. Any time you find yourself caught in one of our local typhoons, feel free to seek shelter at Hillcrest."

"And you may feel free to ride in the thicket, Miss Denver, but I hope you will not ride unescorted. And you really ought to get a tamer mount, too."

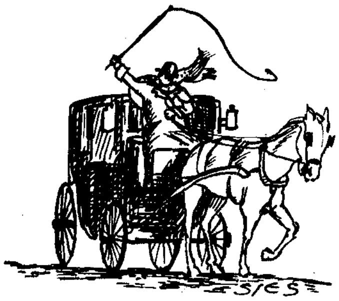
"I like a spirited animal."

"But can you handle one?" he asked. Somehow, I had the impression it was the human animal before me we were speaking of, and not Juliette.

"I am not easily cowed, Your Grace. Wilkins will see you out."

He bowed, rather nimbly for a large man, and left.

Why, I wondered, was he so anxious to buy back his land now that he would pay me more than the place was worth? If it was no more than the tip bit off his piece of pie, he could wait nineteen years. And if he couldn't wait nineteen years why had he not offered the deal to my aunt, who would certainly have jumped at his extravagant offer? He must want to get rid of me. But why? The more I considered the matter the more confused I became, and the more determined to remain exactly where I was and see what happened. And it was not too long before things began happening.



By early afternoon the sun was shining; all the bleak grayness was gone out of the day, and the breeze from the windows was refreshing.

"Slack, I'm going into Pevensey to speak to the revenue officer," I announced. "Will you come with me?"

The question was rhetorical. Slack is an inveterate gadabout and we went off immediately to Smith's little office next door to the milliner's.

"I can't think it was smugglers, ma'am," he assured me when I told him about the strange noises. "There is little enough smuggling going on at this time, and what there is comes in at Romney Marsh up the east coast for the most part. Since the war with Napoleon, smuggling has been cut down considerably."

"You don't think they might have been using the place for hiding their contraband, then? It's having stood empty for a while might have led them to think it a safe spot."

"Mercy, ma'am, you've been there upward of a month now. You, between a pair of lords as you are, are in the safest spot on the coast. You may be sure they would never land on Clavering's doorstep. Many's the time I've seen His Grace out in his yacht, tailing suspicious vessels. He keeps a patrol on his whole stretch of coast, has men posted to see no one lands. You couldn't be safer if you were in a church."

"It was the Duke of Clavering who suggested to me the noises I heard might be smugglers," I told him.

"Did he do so? That surprises me, for if anyone knows how unlikely it is that they would come there, it is His Grace."

"He felt that as Miss Slack and I have no man about the house—except for the servants, of course—they might impose on us."

"Ah, well, they would never harm a lady in any case, so you've nothing to fear. They're not vicious at all. Let me know if you have any more trouble, but it seems to me your noise was no more than a couple of poachers."

"They would not poach Clavering's land, all trapped and posted as it is."

"No, not Clavering's. But it might be they were running from Inglewood and got a scare by Clavering's warden. They would be at pains to hide their bag—might have chucked it under some bushes or whatnot at your place."

"I suppose it might have been that," I said, dissatisfied. "But it was the *grate* that made the racket, and that suggests someone right *in* the house."

"It's odd, surely. If you find out what it was, let me know, and in any case I'll stop around next time I'm out that way."

We returned home, had a call from my aunt before dinner to enquire into the grate and to be assured that it was only the house settling. She confirmed Smith's story that she had never seen a sign nor heard a word of a smuggler along our coastline, due to Clavering's patrols. She laid to rest as well my fears of spring flooding; the road had flooded once twenty years ago for a few days, and never since. So Clavering's dire warnings were intended only to frighten us.

"He is extremely disagreeable, Priscilla. You don't want to have a thing to do with him," she added.

The Claverings were of impeccable lineage—which should have appealed to her love of old and mighty blood, tinged with gold, too, to judge by his lands and home.

"He never invites a soul to Belview," she said next, which explained the acid remark. He had nothing to do with her, so to save face she said she had nothing to do with him.

"He has been here twice," I pointed out, and watched her bridle.

"He only wants to get Seaview from you. He might have told *me* he wanted to buy it. I would not have been averse to selling it to him."

"He has upped the price to thirty-five hundred," I had the exquisite joy of telling her. She was immediately desolate. I could see her writhe in chagrin.

"I'm sure it's worth every penny of it. Naturally I made a very good price for my own niece." The thing was done, and the only way now was to accept it with good grace, and prate of generosity.

Now that we had settled in, neighbors came to call often and we returned their calls. We had a quite respectable number of people to greet and speak to in the village, and never left the church after service on Sundays without being drawn into some group for a chat. We were active with the women of the parish in visiting the sick and feeding the hungry. I might mention that gentlemen other than Cousin George took some little interest in me too. One of our favorite callers was Mr. Harvey McMaster, a gentleman farmer nearby who was well educated, well-to-do, and well mannered.

He was clearly over thirty-five and plain in appearance. Some days previously he had been to call and asked me to accompany him to Eastbourne, where he had business.

It was my first longish trip in an open carriage. There is nothing like a high-perch open carriage to give one a view of the countryside. The conversation throughout was most decorous, not a word spoken that the bishop could frown at. This southeast corner of England, he informed me as we drove along, was the most history-laden part of the country. He pointed out architectural features denoting the reigns of the various invaders. A Roman fort, a Norman church, a modern Martello Tower built to hold Bonaparte at bay.

"You will notice the Martello Towers are manned," he said, and indeed sentries were to be seen in their highly visible red jackets, parading back and forth before the gray stone cylindrical towers that dotted the coast at regular intervals. "Boney might think this is an excellent time for a surprise attack on us, when we *assume* he is busy at Prussia. I know I keep my pistols loaded, and have my men trained up as well as ever they were in Papa's day, when invasion was considered imminent."

I felt a little icy finger of fear creep up my spine at this talk. This was more likely to put me off with my new home than any talk of smugglers or floods. I brought up the subject of smugglers, just to gauge the sentiments of an objective, sensible person like McMaster. Clearly Clavering had been trying to frighten me, and since Officer Smith was in charge, he would be likely to give the impression he had things under control.

"Oh yes, they are still active," he told me, without a moment's hesitation. "Ever since Bonaparte went to Prussia, it has been going on much as it used to. Englishmen don't stop drinking brandy and buying silk just because of a war. From Margate to Bournemouth there are men engaged in it. We have some right here in Pevensey."

"Officer Smith keeps a close eye on them, I should think."

"He does what he can. He took a boatload a week or so ago, but there is collusion between them, of course. The smugglers are in an excellent position to do a little spying for England. Who but they would know if Bonaparte is assembling a flotilla at Boulogne? Some of them are spies as well as smugglers, with a gentlemen's agreement that they will not be caught, I think. They do a great deal of good in their former capacity, and little enough harm in the latter if you don't bother them. The government is taxing us to death. Ten percent on our income wasn't enough; they had to raise it for the war, and a guinea a head for male servants, a tax on our carriages and our windows and I don't know what else. They could at least let a man have a glass of brandy without paying through the nose for it. I don't blink an eye if a friend offers me a glass of brandy. I know it is smuggled, but I don't resent it, and it is no secret every inch of silk at Peters' Drapery Shop is smuggled."

My mind flew to my green silk gown, and I felt that I, too, was an unwitting accessory to the Gentlemen.

"Well, half the men doing it are so poor it is all that is keeping body and soul together," he went on. "With the common lands enclosed they have nowhere to graze a cow, and with fellows like Clavering trapping their land so that even a hare is beyond them, what are they to do?"

We arrived at Eastbourne, a formal and elegant little place. McMaster went to the grain merchant, and I poked about the shops for an hour, meeting him for lunch at an inn. Quite a brisk breeze blew in from the ocean on the way home, and when we got to Hillcrest on the way home, I asked him in for tea.

"Oh, this note came for you after you left," Slack told me, once McMaster had left us. I had a fair idea it was from Clavering, as indeed it was.

It was a bare two lines scrawled in black ink in a fist that managed to be both casual and arrogant.

Please come to tea tomorrow at 4:00.
Clavering

Not your obedient servant, or yours truly, or anything but "Clavering." He could make even a social invitation an insult.

"This is no invitation; it is a summons. Well, I suppose I can't send our regrets before tomorrow. I don't intend sending my servants out into the night."

I saw Slack was eager to go. I was curious to see Belview myself, but would not accept a summons.

That evening we received a call from Clavering himself. He waited to be announced on this occasion, adopting formal manners to match his black evening clothes.

"I have just seen the last of my guests home, and took the liberty of dropping in to see if you had my invitation," he said, helping himself to a chair with a mere vestige of a bow.

I noted resentfully that he invited *us* to tea, others to dinner. Certainly a man in his position must entertain lavishly, whatever my aunt said to the contrary.

"Yes, we just received it. Very kind of you to offer, but I'm afraid we are busy tomorrow."

"All day? We could make it a morning visit, if that is more convenient for you. Or perhaps you are free for dinner?"

"We are dining out," I lied amiably.

"I am here only for a few days, and would like to see you at Belview," Clavering said. "I had thought to give you a tour. It has some interesting features."

"Well, perhaps . . . " I said, intercepting a vigorous nod from Slack.

"It's settled you come to tea at four o'clock," Clavering said in a very high-handed manner, then turned immediately to other topics. "About your grate, Miss Denver, has it ceased troubling you with its noise?"

"Yes, I think it has settled down, and I am very happy. We were half-afraid of ghosts."

"You believe in ghosts?" he asked, in quite a polite voice.

"Certainly not. It was a joke, though it was a very odd noise all the same."

"I could swear I heard *voices* when you were in the cellar," Slack said.

"Where did they come from? What part of the room?" Clavering asked as he arose and walked to the grate.

"It seemed to be more on this side," she said, pointing to the right-hand side. The fireplace is on the east wall, facing Clavering's land, as I mentioned earlier. He looked at the fully-windowed south wall facing the sea. In the corner between the fireplace and front wall was a large, nicely carved parson's bench with a high back. The room was panelled three-quarters of the way to the ceiling, and the bench blended in perfectly with it, being of the same wood and carved in the same manner, with a trefoil design repeated three times at the top of the arched panels, to fill in the point. One often sees such a design in the pews of old Gothic churches.

"The fireplace itself or this bench?" Clavering asked.

"A bit in between," Slack informed him, and walked to his side. I could see in her pleased glances at Clavering that if I didn't watch her closely, she would begin touting him up to me as an excellent fellow.

"This is nonsense," I said firmly, and refused to leave my chair to join them in the search for the echo of an echo.

"Could it have come from the bench, I wonder," Slack went on, enjoying Clavering's attention. Oh yes, he would be a paragon before she went to bed that night. If he went much further, she'd be trying to tell me how handsome he was.

"Maybe if we moved the bench away from the wall. . ." she said.

"It doesn't move. It's built in," he told her.

I don't know why it should have annoyed me so much that *he* knew things about my house I didn't know myself. "Nonsense, of course it moves," I heard myself say. And *I* was the one who wanted this folly stopped.

COMMENT III

by Barbara T. Grimes

Each of a couple who has deeply cared
thinks he himself is the more devoted,
or she herself, to heed the gender.

It doesn't matter. The love they're shared
cannot be measured, just duly noted
as mutual, and the need as tender.

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He didn't say a word but lifted his black brows at me and put his two hands around the corners of the bench and began pulling and heaving. It was awkward to get a good hold on it, because it went right to the floor; it was not on feet.

"All right. Please stop," I said angrily, for it was perfectly plain that if that ox couldn't budge it, it wouldn't budge.

"Really I think the voices came from a place closer to the fireplace," Slack then said.

"I begin to think they emanated from your head, Slack," I said. She didn't bother to reply, but only smiled at Clavering as much as to say, I must humor her.

Clavering too decided to humor me, and they both took seats. "Well, I believe the Duke has earned a glass of wine, Priscilla," Slack told me.

"I hope a guest in my house doesn't have to earn a glass of wine by rearranging my furniture," I said as she went off with a swish of her black skirts to get not only wine but macaroons, dried cherries, and nuts.

Clavering proceeded to put on a performance that was as disgusting as anything I have witnessed in my life. "I am worried about you two ladies alone here and at the mercy of the smugglers," he said, dipping into the cherries.

"Officer Smith assures us there is not the least danger," I told him.

"Oh, poor Smith. The fellow never catches anyone, so he refuses to believe the smugglers are active. It's time I replace him."

"Have you been put in charge of customs?" I asked him.

"I have always had a hand in it, and in most local appointments," was his insolent reply. "I think what I shall do is to send two of my stout footmen down here at night to watch over the place for you."

"We have a butler and two footboys, as well as the groom. Thank you all the same," I told him.

Again the two exchanged that smile of toleration, and Clavering hunched his hulking shoulders, taking another fistful of cherries. The pair then went into a discussion for which I can find no other word than flirtation. Before I knew what was happening, Slack was telling the private details of her life—which involved in no small degree those of my own. I had the pleasure of hearing that I was not a bad child to mind, though always self-willed and headstrong to an extraordinary degree. I was a quick learner but would not apply myself unless goaded unmercifully.

"I don't envy you your task, ma'am," he told her, and held his glass out for her to refill to the brim.

I heard her tell him about Mama's separation from her family, Papa's summer visits and eventual death, the advent of Mr. Higgins. "He *drank*," she said with the strongest tone of disapproval, while jealously watching Clavering's glass to see if it would hold another drop.

Before long Mr. Hemmings, my old beau, was dragged forth. Edward Hemmings, now married to Edna Billings who was fortunate to get him, smokey jackets and all. Clavering nodded with polite interest and asked Slack why I had seen fit to decline his offer. "Just not the marrying kind, like myself," Slack said with a smirk.

"It is a crime to deprive some gentleman of your company," he contradicted baldly and then posed the question that enshrined him as her Saint Clavering. "Now how does it come that such a charming lady as yourself is not married yet, Miss Slack?"

Yet! As though at fifty she is likely to make a match. Slack, who has never had a beau in her entire life, replied, "I guess I just never met the right man."

"It is early days yet for a young lady like you. You will have Miss Denver's salon cluttered up with every Tom, Dick and Harry in the community if I know anything."

"You will find the competition lively, Your Grace," I told him. "Would you like me to leave so that you can get right on with the proposal tonight, and beat the crowds?"

He laughed lightly and actually *winked* at Slack. "Not a bad idea," he replied. "But then I wouldn't want to deprive you of her company."

You may be forgiven for thinking I have overlooked some references to myself, at only twenty-five, being still eligible for marriage. None were made.

Finally he arose and said, "I look forward with the greatest pleasure to seeing you both at Belview tomorrow. *À demain.*" He bowed and was off.

"Well, *I* think he is very civil," Slack said when he had gone.

"Do you, Slack? *I* think he is very sly. Good night."

She took the hint and left.

The next morning was ideal riding weather, and my first activity after breakfast was to go to the stable and practice.

"What you ought to do if you mean to ride is get yourself a habit made up," Slack told me later. I already knew it, of course. I had looked for a pattern in Eastbourne but not found one I liked.

"We'll go to town now and pick a pattern and some material," I said. "We'll have luncheon in town. It will be a change for us." Slack, ever the gadabout, was not hard to convince.

I chose for my habit a rather dashing bottle-green serge, and purchased a plain riding bonnet. Our pleasant morning's diversion was followed by an equally pleasant luncheon at the Lighthouse Inn—which was spoiled by an unpleasant incident. The servant who brought our meal was a cripple. He had a left foot that dragged behind the other, and Slack asked him in a kindly way just before we left what had happened to him.

"I fell into one of the Dook's man-traps," he said. "He was posted, but it's hard times, Lady, and a man has to feed his family. He didn't prosecute," he added.

"So much for your Duke of Clavering," I told Slack.

"He had his signs posted," she said defensively.

"Very handy for those who can read. You are no doubt aware many of the lower classes cannot."

"That servant could. He wrote out our bill, so he can read, and knew he was taking a risk."

She was beyond reason. We stopped to chat with a few acquaintances, and went to the wharf for a view of the ocean before returning home. The fishing boats had gone out, but other commercial vessels were to be seen, and one ship of the Royal Navy was out anchored in the harbor, looking very trim with its white ensign flapping in the breeze.

I spotted Officer Smith, who then approached us. "Have you had any more trouble with prowlers, Miss Denver?" he asked.

It was the first sign of interest; certainly he had not come out to visit as he had said he would. "None. We have decided it was not a prowler at all, but some mechanical trouble in the chimney."

"Very likely," he agreed at once. "There's the *Nancy Jane* dancing around, up to no good," Smith told me.

"You think it's a smuggler's boat?" I asked, following the line of his eyes.

"It's *his* ship," Smith said, pointing to a great hulk of a man ten or twelve yards away. The lounging man wore a black toque, from which reddish hair stuck out, a black sweater and a pair of trousers that were dirt-colored but might possibly once have been fawn. "I *know* it's used for smuggling."

"Why don't you arrest him?" I asked.

"He isn't carrying a load. I've been out."

"You have actually to catch him with the brandy aboard, do you?" I asked.

"Oh yes. We need our evidence," he replied, shocked at my question. "He is waiting for a good day to slip across the Channel. That's Louie FitzHugh. Lazy Louie they call him."

"He was caught bribing revenue officers, was he not?" I had heard of this fellow from Mr. McMasters.

"It was suspected. They couldn't prove anything."

"If the officers were taking bribes, they too were criminals — paid out of the public purse."

"Yes. If the officers were guilty, then Louie FitzHugh is more guilty, but he goes on breaking the law, unmolested."

"It is your duty to molest him, Officer," I pointed out.

"Only if he brings it in within the bounds of my jurisdiction. He is clean by the time he comes here, but you can smell the brandy on the *Nancy Jane.* The smell lingers, you know, there is no hiding it; but everytime I board he's clean. I'd like to know where he puts it ashore. Up Romney way, they say he doesn't come in there, but he must. He certainly doesn't land it at Clavering's shore. The Duke has his own patrol, and Lazy Louie is his special target. I work closely with Clavering. We are both determined to get him. There, his horse is being brought to him now. Has a groom, like a gentleman, to look after his mount, and what a fine animal it is."

A sleek, black animal was being led forth. Lazy Louie took the reins and mounted with a graceful, effortless movement that I envied. It was something achieved only by men though. In the same easy way did Clavering stride his mount. Horse and rider turned and galloped off into town without so much as a glance at Officer Smith. This was the height of arrogance—not to even glance at your enemy. Really there was a touch of Clavering's arrogance in the man.

"The fellow has a house, too. Lives in altogether too high a style for a fisherman that is not at market two days a week, nor one-half the time. He's a smuggler, not a doubt of it, and one day I'll catch him," Officer Smith promised. The grim set of his lips made me think he had been saying the same thing for some time.

Preparing for tea at the Duke's that afternoon, I put on my yellow lutestring gown, and rather wished it were dinner we were going to, so that I might wear the dashing green silk instead.

Before long, we were on our way to Belview, along a road that wound this way and that like a snake, displaying various vistas of rolling lawns, groups of trees, bushes, and once a gaggle of geese. At length it straightened to a broad curve and Belview came into sight. It stretched to the left and right of an impressive recessed doorway and rose three stories high. The place was a blend of Gothic and fortress, but it was cleverly done so that the turrets on either end of the facade and the crenellated line of roof between did not look absurd at all. I thought I had seen turrets from the road, but they were not visible from the front. We looked for a time at the facade, then went up the half-dozen stairs to the doorway. Looking behind us, we saw Belview to be well named. The view was lovely indeed.

It took no more than one knock to bring the butler, and we were shown in. A veritable ocean of shiny oaken floors

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Love sought is good, but given unsought, is better.

William Shakespeare
Twelfth Night

stretched into the distance before us, and to the left was an ornately carved grand staircase with shallow, broad steps, its wall hung with paintings of the Duke's ancestors.

As I peered up at these framed faces, the flesh-and-blood Clavering descended, running lightly in a manner that was at odds with all the solemn formality of the house. He smiled faintly at me, reserving his better expression for Slack.

"How kind of you to come," he said to her, as he showed us to the reception room. Someone in that house was fond of yellow. Like the hall, with its yellow, silk-covered walls, there was a quantity of yellow in this room. The draperies were gold, and there were golden and green sofas and chairs spaced about between tables and windows. It was all very elegant, with fine Persian carpets whose price I was familiar with from looking for replacements at home. I took pains that not a jot of admiration escape my eyes, but after I had been seated a few minutes, I discovered that a feeling of happy peace came over me. The yellow was well chosen: It brought sunshine into the room, and there was some tranquility in the order of the place.

"Very pleasant," I complimented him, so as not to appear surly.

"Would you like your tea now or later? You were going to have a look around the house."

"I'm not at all hungry yet," Slack said, though he had actually put the question to me, but I, too, was more curious than hungry, and the house was to be seen first.

"This is the Marine Salon," he said, taking us to the hall and off to the right. We entered a large well-lit room, whose only claim to being a Marine Salon was two large glass-fronted cabinets full of shells and a clutch of dull seascapes on the walls. Other than that, it was just another sitting room, done in depressing shades of blue and green, with sea-green window hangings.

"We have done it in sea-shades," he said, and walked to one of the cabinets. There were all kinds of shells, some great things as big as a man's head in conch and other convoluted shapes, as well as a flatter one in the shape of an oyster that was between twelve and eighteen inches across, and had a whole shelf to itself. I mentioned that I had never seen such interesting variety on our beach, and learned that an ancestor had collected these specimens from all over the world.

Next, we went into a pokey little study, a dark and uninviting chamber. "This is the room that most closely resembles Seaview," he told us. It was not so very unlike my largest salon, but still it was an unhappy comparison—his worst and my best. Our attention was called to some carving by the same Grinling Gibbons, who had done the carving at Seaview. It had originally decorated a bed chamber at Belview and been physically prised from there to decorate my salon.

"But it is really *my* collection I want you to see," he said, when we had looked our fill at the study. "My Roman things. I keep them in the library, for lack of a better spot."

The library room would have been very nice if not littered with broken bits of rubbish. Smashed heads of statues, legs, feet, arms and hands were spread over tables. There were pots and jugs with and without handles and in various states of disrepair. One very large and ugly piece sat alone in state on a pedestal. This piece was a head, dirty and encrusted with moss—of an old soldier, I thought.

"This is a head of Mithras," he said, looking at us for praise.

"Very handsome," Slack humored him. "Who was Mithras?"

"A Persian sun god."

"I thought it was Roman—*things* you collected?" I hardly knew what word to apply to his debris.

"He was discovered in Persia by the legionaires and became the soldiers' deity. He came right along to Britain with them."

"Imagine that—it came all the way from Persia!" Slack said.

"No, no, it was rather the idea they brought with them. This was carved in Britain—it is native stone," he said, offended.

"I didn't think anyone would have bothered carrying it all the way from Persia," I said. Again the jaws twitched, and again he contained his mirth.

"They really ought to be available for the public to see," he said finally.

"How would you do it?" I asked. "You wouldn't want anyone here."

"The fact is, I hope to set up a small museum," he said, in the tone of an announcement. "Eastbourne has one, and Pevensey could do with one, too. It is really a shame that so few know about or *care* about our Roman heritage." He paused, as if deciding whether to go on. "The museum I have in mind is Seaview. It is particularly appropriate."

"It happens to be occupied!" I said sharply.

"Shall we go back to the Yellow Salon and sit down?" he suggested, in an attempt to turn aside my wrath. He thought I would be too civil to argue over tea. He was mistaken.

"Would you be kind enough to pour, Miss Denver?" he asked. I lifted the large silver pot and poured into fine Wedgwood cups. Dainty sandwiches were set out on a silver tray, as well as a tempting variety of sweets. It was an excellent tea.

I was not turned away from my goal by it, however. "You were saying you consider *my* home particularly suitable for *your* museum. Would you be kind enough to explain that rather strange statement, Your Grace?"

"There is justice in selecting Seaview as the site of the museum," he said. "I do not consider it my own, the museum. I intend endowing it, but giving it to the town."

"I don't know about justice, but there is surely some injustice in cashiering a private dwelling for such a purpose."

"No injustice is intended. You recall we spoke of thirty-five hundred pounds."

"No, Your Grace, I recall *you* spoke of thirty-five hundred pounds. I recall as well you had an invalid aunt on whose behalf you sought the place."

"I had hoped to appeal to your tender compassion for an elderly invalid. Finding such an emotion lacking, I revert to business instead. Seaview is built on the remains of a Roman fort of course— "

"A Roman fort? I heard nothing of that!" I exclaimed.

"Did you not? But you mentioned having been in the cellars the other day. You must have seen the stone wall."

"Stone wall? Certainly I saw stone walls, one vastly superior to the others . . . "

"The wall below the rattling grate is the remains of one of the old Roman forts. The desecration that has been done to the Roman ruins is really appalling."

"I noticed that the wall was finer than the others. But you mean it is actually surviving from the Roman period? How old would it be?"

"The Saxon pirates were in the Channel around A.D. 280. It would be more than fifteen hundred years old."

"Just think!" I said, becoming excited now. "And it looks as good as new."

"Better than the stonework done today. Well, their roads still survive, and they are some of our better roads too, straight and smooth-surfaced. They built them to last."

"Is it only because of that wall in the basement you think my house would be suitable?"

"I said justice. My family destroyed one of the old Saxon forts. I would like to do something to repay our debt to historians, and collect in one spot such material as I can find relating to the period. At Seaview even the cellars would be of interest."

"Surely the city itself would be a better location. Seaview is a long walk from Pevensey, and not everyone has a horse or carriage. Then too," I added with a significant voice, "the roads are flooded every spring."

"Not *every* spring," he admitted sheepishly.

"No, not since the last century, according to Lady Inglewood. But I think my objection is a valid one. The city itself would be the better location."

"The old Roman fort was actually standing there, you know. It would give a great sense of being there, to realize that where you stood looking at the artifacts, Roman soldiers actually once looked out at the invaders."

"You speak of fifteen hundred years ago or more, Your Grace. Compared to this, nineteen years will be almost nothing. In nineteen years you can set up your museum. Meanwhile, I see no reason why I should give up *my* home for *your* hobby."

"To benefit the community," he said simply.

"I doubt the community at large has much interest in Roman remains. I suggest if you feel this wild passion in benefiting the community, you rid your lands of mantraps, before you maim anyone else."

"Ah, you have met Leo Milkin. He fell into the—" he began suddenly, then stopped suddenly, as if he wanted to say more, give some excuse for his behavior.

It effectively ruined the tea party, and I saw Slack was unhappy with me, but I was glad I had brought it up nevertheless.

"You are not at all interested in my project then?" he asked stiffly.

"Prove to me you really care about benefiting the community," I suggested. "Remove the mantraps, and we shall discuss the matter."

"Impossible!" he said, without even giving it a moment's thought.

One word revealed him for the hypocrite he was.

"Also impossible for me to sell my house, which, incidentally, I have called Willow Hall," I said, and arose with a commanding look at Slack to accompany me.

"That is absurd! It is not a Hall, and there isn't a willow anywhere near it!" he answered angrily, but of course it wasn't the new name that angered him so much as my daring not to do as he wished.

"You are mistaken. There is a beautiful willow tree in the back garden, and if I want to call it a Hall, I will."

He glared, and I went on politely. "Thank you for the tea, Your Grace, and the tour. Both very enjoyable. Do feel free to call on us at Willow Hall any time you are passing by." Naturally he would not call again.

"You're making a mistake, Miss Denver," he said in a cold, hard voice that sounded strangely threatening. Then he turned us over to the butler to be shown out. Slack didn't say a word in his defense as I reviled him scathingly all the way home. As we dismounted she even went so far as to say, "I am disappointed in him."

"I'm not. It is no more than I expected from him."

That night the grate took to jumping as it had not jumped before. It shook for a full minute, as though a giant hand were shaking the very wall. Quite frankly, it was terrifying.

Slack and I stared at each other mutely. What was there to say? I sent the two footboys out to look around for poachers, but they reported there was no one outside.

"I think Clavering had something to do with it," I told Slack, reminding her of the threat. But neither of us could think of any means by which he could have accomplished it, and it remained a mystery.

Furthermore, it happened again the next morning at half-past ten. It was Sunday, but due to the rainy, dismal weather we stayed home from church. We lit a small fire, for cheer rather than warmth. The grate heaved harder than before. It shook for a minute and a half, then stopped, and I am willing to swear on a Bible that I heard the sound of echoing laughter coming from the chimney.

I went as close as I could to the flue and called, "Who's there? Stop it at once! Do you hear?" It shook harder than ever, and I jumped back, frightened half out of my wits.

"It's a ghost! It *is*!" Slack told me, and blessed herself.

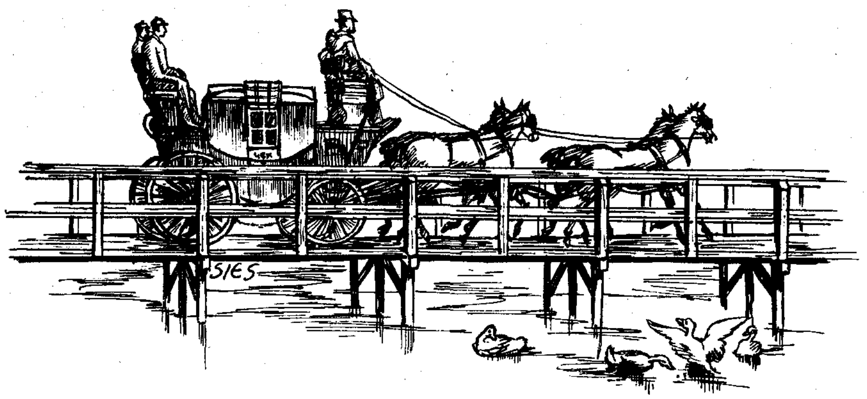
"A ducal ghost," I replied angrily. "I'll go to Pevensey tomorrow and get a builder to come out and look at the house," I said.

In the afternoon the rain abated but did not stop entirely. Lady Inglewood and George came to call and were treated not only to a telling of our trip to Belview but to an account of the stunts of the grate as well. George, I think, believed us, but his mother spoke reassuring words of winds and drafts and loose bricks. I could have throttled her.

I told her that Clavering meant to set up a museum. She said he had been riding this hobbyhorse forever but never did any more than talk about it. The only other item of interest that passed during the visit was my invitation to them to come to dinner the next week for Slack's fifty-first birthday.

By the next morning the rain had stopped, but it was by no means a pleasant day. The sky was a very dull, ominous color. We went to Pevensey to ask the builder to look over the chimney, but he was very busy and couldn't come for a few days. At Slack's insistence we also made a stop at the circulating library where she picked up a book on the Roman ruins at Bath.

We did not eat at the inn but brought home our dinner fresh from the fishermen at the wharf. The sullen skies had toned down to pearl gray by afternoon, and I had a little lesson on Juliette before going in to stitch up my new green riding habit. I found Slack with her head in the book about Bath.



"This is very interesting, Priscilla," she told me. '*Aquae Sulis,*' Bath used to be called. It was dedicated to Minerva. "The baths were used for medicinal purposes, of course. The water came out of the springs at one hundred and eighty degrees. Fancy that."

"There must have been some parboiled Romans at Aquae Sulis, I fancy. Well, I think I'll start the jacket first," I said, and picked up a sleeve.

"The baths at Aquae Sulis are quite different from the baths they built elsewhere—larger and more impressive altogether. They actually had swimming baths there, Priscilla. They still exist, just like our wall, one rectangular—the largest—with a lead floor, and two circular baths. I can hardly credit that we *lived* in Wiltshire for twenty-four years and never had the sense to go to Bath to see these Roman ruins."

"We had neither of us succumbed to gout or rheumatism or to the Duke of Clavering at the time," I told her, a little sharply.

"There is a museum there, too. You really must have a look at this book, Priscilla. I never read anything so interesting. They found many coins and even precious stones thrown into the springhead, and it is believed they were thrown in as offerings to the gods. Isn't it odd how we go about our lives without ever giving a thought to the past?"

"Some of us are becoming so immersed in it we never give a thought to the present. May I disturb your research to ask you for those venerable artifacts, the scissors?"

I worked alone on my riding habit till dinner while Slack read, aloud oftener than was pleasant, about chalybeate springs and other things that meant no more to me than they did to her.

The next few days passed in much this same way. I, working alone at my riding habit, spent the better part of the week finishing it. Slack had become a confirmed amateur historian, an instant expert on the subject of Aquae Sulis. I rode Juliette on the good days and could canter around the garden without mortal terror. The Inglewoods came a few times, and one day we took tea with them.

Clavering stayed away. We met him once in the village. His Grace was kind enough to lift his hat and say, "How do you do?" in arctic accents. Slack addressed a few remarks to him, but as Lazy Louie came trotting down the road on his big black stallion at that same time, my interest was turned to him. Clavering looked up as Lazy Louie rode by. They exchanged a meaningful look, but did not speak. I was struck by a similarity between them—a way of holding the head, a stiff, proud posture.

Home again, I put my sewing aside and explored the attic, where I thought I might uncover some rare bibelot or piece of furniture cast aside by one without my discerning eye. Before descending, I went to the window and surveyed the countryside. From this vantage point I had a good view of Belview. I also had my first glimpse of the ruined chapel in the meadow, of which I had heard so much. It was well and truly ruined; there was not a wall standing higher than a yard off the ground.

Suddenly I saw two men walking hastily and stealthily through the meadows, in the direction of the chapel. The local people all knew about the traps, so these must be strangers. They should be warned, but how to get to them without falling into the traps myself? I at least knew the traps were there. I must risk it, and walk very carefully.

I ran, rather than walked, and decided to make the trip on Juliette to save time. I let her out to a canter as we went through the thicket, not slowing the pace till we came to the meadow's edge. The grass was long at the summer's end. So ideal, of course, for concealing the treacherous traps. I gazed beyond, searching for the men, and saw nothing.

At a careful walk, straining my eyes forward at every step, we advanced, Juliette and I, till we were within shouting distance of where I had seen the men; then I began shouting, and continued to do so till I got right up to the chapel, but there was no answering call, nor even a sign of the men. They had vanished. There was one mound of rock higher than the others, and I dismounted to clamber up on it for a better view, all in vain. The men were not to be seen. They couldn't *both* be dead in a trap so soon. Behind me was my own path and theirs, several yards away, highly visible as a parting in the grass. Both trails stopped at the ruins.

This was my first opportunity to view the remains of the chapel, and I was highly curious to do so—but more frightened than curious. The men could be crouching behind any pile of rocks, hiding with the intention of attacking me. My mind full of unanswered questions, I returned home through the same depression in the grass through which I had come, knowing it to be free of danger.

I now had another mystery to go along with my clanking grate, and as if to increase my apprehension, that object took to rattling again on Thursday. It was Slack who lifted her head from her book long enough to come up with an idea culled from her new interest. "I wonder if it would be possible we are sitting on buried treasure," she said. "It would account for Clavering not wanting anyone wandering about his lands, as well as for his wanting to get Seaview back, so that he could search for it here."

"We are on the coast—pirate's treasure! Some of Captain Morgan's loot from Cuba or Panama," I said, taking it up eagerly to keep Slack's interest from Bath.

"I was thinking more of some Clavering treasure, buried at one time or another due to some of the local wars."

"Or concealed in the house itself! That would account for his being willing to pay thirty-five hundred pounds for the house. Slack, shall we have a house hunt?" But she lost interest in the conversation and returned to her "studies."

On Friday morning, I found a more affable person in Mr. Pickering, the builder who came from Pevensey to investigate the phenomenon of the noisy grate.

He was a plain, no-nonsense sort of a man. He began his examination in the salon, at the grate itself.

"You've got yourself a mighty fine fireplace, ma'am. Your trouble ain't here. I'll just throw a ladder up to your roof and have a gander at your chimney." This was done almost with the ease of expressing the intention. He was up there for the better part of half an hour, and I was soon informed that I had a mighty fine chimney and roof, too. All nice and flat, and with no loose masonry. He mentioned the possibility of a squirrel down the chimney, or a bird, but as the rattling went on during progressive days—including several on which a fire burned—I could not think a well-baked squirrel would be so rambunctious.

Next it was the basement, which was also proclaimed to be mighty fine. This was the last hope, and I went to the basement with Mr. Pickering. The Roman wall he did not recognize as Roman but did recognize as being mighty fine. I told him its origin, and he was interested. "Seaview is built over an old Roman fort, you know," I told him.

"No," he said, shaking his head firmly.

"They didn't build *over* it, they built next to it. If they'd built over it, they'd have used two walls. You'd have two Roman walls at right angles. You've only got the one, so the Roman fort, if that's what it is, is out to the side of your place, not under it."

I found this sensible, as I might have expected from Mr. Pickering.

"I assume the fort was bigger than Seaview," he went on. "If it was exactly the same size, you'd have four Roman walls in your cellars, of course, but assuming it was bigger, the builder would have used as much of the foundations as possible: both walls at right angles. And there's something a bit off about this wall. You see how she's set in a mite from the house wall above?"

He was pointing to a small half window that gave a minimum of light to my cellar. And then I noticed that the stones of the outer wall ran to the ground, but the cellar window was recessed to an abnormal degree.

"Odd they'd do that. It weakens the structure somewhat," Pickering went on. "Why wouldn't they have taken the house wall up straight from the Roman foundation? Must be a reason for it."

"A secret passage?" I enquired eagerly.

"She'd be a slim one," he informed me. "And where would she go?" He looked around for a doorway, but the walls were of uninterrupted stone except for the stairs from the pantry and the window.

"It goes behind this Roman wall into the Roman fort!" I shouted.

He shook his head uncertainly. "You don't find much in the way of a secret passage in these newer homes. In the olden days they had priest's holes and once in a while a passageway into a dungeon, like at Belview, but in these new homes . . . "

"Is it *possible?*"

"A very narrow passageway is possible. We'll go above and have a look," he said, and we went back to the salon. The paneling looked extremely innocent. Mr. Pickering went tapping along the walls with his knuckles this time, listening for hollow sounds. He stopped at the parson's bench. He was convinced it would swing aside to reveal a passageway if only we could find the magic means of movement. We spent the better part of an hour pressing every protuberance anywhere near it. It did not lift, slide, or do a thing but sit as solid as a mountain. At length we had to give it up. I thanked him heartily, paid him, and took him to the kitchen for a glass of ale.

I was more convinced than ever that my house held hidden treasure, and convinced now that it had a secret passage, as well; but when an expert had failed to find it, how should I proceed? There was one who knew more about my house than I knew myself, who had known, for instance, that the parson's bench did not come away from the wall. I was eager to see him, not because he ever *would* tell me, but because I was looking forward to telling him he was mistaken in the location of the fort, and I also wanted to ask whether he had managed to cripple the two unfortunate men who wandered into his meadow.

On Thursday evening we settled in as usual before our fire, Slack with her book, I to work on my riding habit, which was done but for the buttonholes.

"Odd the Duke has not been to call all week," Slack mentioned.

"You are eager to discuss Aquae Sulis, I gather?" I asked ironically. "Very likely he is gone to London. He mentioned he was to go soon."

We were saved from our dull conversation by the sound of the knocker.

"George, and it's only quarter to nine," I said with resignation.

But it was Clavering who was honoring us with a call, after a week of neglect.

"Ladies," he said, bowing. He was again in black evening clothes, having either been out to dinner or dined in state at home. We both nodded; then he advanced to Slack, offering her a large tin box.

"Why, you're early, Your Grace. My birthday isn't till tomorrow," she chirped.

"Is it indeed? I had no idea. This is not a birthday gift, however, but a replacement for your hospitality the other evening." It was opened to reveal about five pounds of dried cherries. "You mentioned you share my predilection for them," he said. Then he turned to me. "And when I discover if there is anything in this world Miss Denver likes, I shall attempt to bring it to her."

"I am fond of good manners, and would be very happy if you could find some to bring with you next time."

"I would not have guessed it, ma'am," he said with a charming smile. "Well, and what have the ladies of Seaview been up to recently?" he asked.

"We have taken up the study of Roman ruins," I replied.

"How interesting," Clavering said, turning to face Slack, so that I had a broad view of a black back, and nothing more but the back of an equally black head. "It is one of the more interesting remains in England," he said, and they were off on a tedious discussion of rectangular baths, round baths, chalybeate springs, arches, and Minerva.

"I always stop a moment when I stand on the diving stone and look at the groove in it made by all those generations of Romans," he was saying.

"Oh, have you been there! How I would love to go to Aquae Sulis," Slack declared. "And my book mentions some ruins in London."

"London is rich in ruins," the Duke said. "It did not even exist when the Romans landed in England. Colchester was then the capital, if it can even be said there was one. But, of course, the Thames and access to the ocean soon made London the natural capital, and eventually the governor presided there to administer the four divisions. It is amazing anything remains considering the number of times it was destroyed, and the nearly two thousand years that have passed, but there is still a great deal to see. The London walls, for instance, are still standing in several places; but the best place to see Roman London is from the cellars. Much of their original pavement is to be seen in shop cellars, and very often a wall, as you have here at Seaview."

"I will certainly bear all this in mind when next we go up to London," she assured him.

"In the meantime, we have made rather an interesting discovery regarding our own Roman ruins," I said.

"Your investigation is causing considerable amuse—*interest* in town," Clavering said.

"If the townspeople are *amused* at my investigation, it is yourself who is to blame, Your Grace, for it is *you* who informed me that Willow Hall stands on the ruins of a Roman fort."

"You must confess, ma'am, I never told you a thing about Willow Hall. What I *did* say is that Seaview is built on *one wall* of a Roman fort. The other walls, of course, were quite destroyed in the earthquakes that occurred around the time it was built."

"You told me my house stands on a Roman fort!" I said angrily, my little triumph destroyed. "Mr. Pickering says the fort is adjacent to that wall, out beyond the house."

"Poor Pickering has not had access to

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The finest scarf or collar made,
To keep a woman warm,
By night or day, on sea or land,
Is still a lover's arm.

William Henry Davies
Space

the original plans of the house, and the drawings of the Roman fort that accompany it. I planned to put all this material in the museum. You can take my word for it, you stand precisely where the Roman fort stood."

"I never heard of any earthquakes in England."

He stared in astonishment. "Up till 1750 we were prone to them. You *must* have read of the terrible London quakes in 1750. They were less severe here at Pevensey, but they did topple three walls of the Roman fort, unfortunately."

"You're making that up!" I charged.

"I refer you to the excellent and highly readable letters of Mr. Horace Walpole. I have a copy of them in my library if you have not, and will be happy to lend them to you."

"I have read all about the London quakes," Slack told me. "Very severe, but I never heard of the Pevensey quakes."

"Neither has anyone else," I muttered.

"But tell me, has there been more trouble with the grate, as you have taken the trouble to have a builder out to investigate?" Clavering asked me.

"Nothing to speak of," I answered. Slack, however, proceeded to reveal every detail.

"This particular spot is prone to earth tremors. I wonder if that is what causes it," the Duke suggested.

"Have you felt tremors?"

"No, I haven't," he said. "But then Belview was not troubled the other time either, when the Roman fort fell."

"It's something to do with the foundations," I said. "Mr. Pickering feels they are irregular. I'll do a little excavating there, to the east of the wall, and—"

"No!" Clavering said firmly.

"I certainly will!" I answered automatically.

"I think not, Miss Denver. That is *my* land. You are ignorant of Roman antiquities. I plan to have it all excavated after you leave, by professionals," Clavering said.

"You'll have a long wait!"

"Nineteen years is a long time to have to endure the discomfort of a rattling grate and the uncertainty of what causes it. If you wish to sell, I shall begin my excavating at once and solve the mystery."

"I am content to wait," I said. "But there is another little mystery that bothers me. I saw two men disappear into your meadow the other day, and when I went after them to warn them—"

"You didn't go into that trapped meadow!" he bellowed.

"Yes, I did. I went, *very carefully*, to warn them, and they had vanished. Could you throw any light on the matter, Your Grace?"

"I had a couple of chaps in to begin clearing out the foundations for the reconstruction work I spoke of. Very likely it was they you saw. They came on along to Belview to speak to me about it."

"On wings, I must conclude. Their trail stopped at the chapel."

"They must have hidden in the foundation, with a view to frightening you, or worse. I really would very strongly advise you stay out of that area."

"I looked in the foundations."

He tensed. "And what did you find?"

"Nothing. I'm sure they were not hiding there."

The tenseness was gone, and he turned playful in relief. "You have your ghosts in the chimney, and now it seems I have phantoms in my meadow."

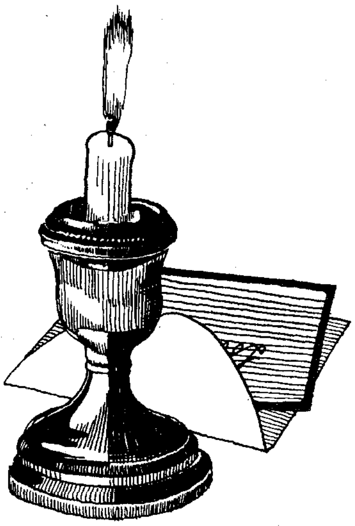
"I doubt either ghosts or phantoms have much to do with either situation, but that is not to say there isn't some connection."

"What do you conceive to be the link?" he asked, but before I was required to invent one, Slack, who had been unwrapping her cherries, passed the box to Clavering, and the subject of ghosts was forgotten.

"So you had Juliette in the meadow. How do you two get along?" he asked.

"We are coming to terms. I have been around the garden dozens of times, and am ready to tackle a larger field."

"You are welcome to use the thickets, as I told you before. I advise you strongly not to go out unaccompanied. I frequently take a ride in the afternoon, and would be happy to go with you."



I had not the least idea of revealing my scanty progress to him and declined the offer. Slack excused herself to bring wine and macaroons.

"Making yourself a new gown?" he asked, after she left. I had been working on my buttonholes throughout his visit.

"No, a riding habit."

"Very nice. The color will suit you," he said, looking from the bottle green jacket to my hair, eyes and face.

"It is not beauty but serviceability I am interested in," I replied.

"Still, you have chosen well. And executed well, too. A very fine stitch. Are you sure you wouldn't like to ride with me? I am considered a good rider."

"I'm sure you are, but such skills must be acquired, not brushed on by one who possesses them, like a coat of paint."

He picked up Slack's book about Bath and thumbed through it. "You take no interest at all in this?" he asked.

"I am learning, interested or not."

"It is a fascinating study, you know. Would you not be interested to take a drive over to Porchester Castle one day? And I have an excellent library at Belview. I hope you and Miss Slack will feel free to use it."

"I will be sure to tell Miss Slack. It is her hobby, not mine."

He told her about the library himself when she returned a moment later, but did not mention the visit to Porchester Castle. She couldn't press the cherries, macaroons and wine on him hard enough or fast enough. I think it was her insistence that caused him to leave not much later.

I arose to walk to the hall with him. "About Porchester . . ." he began, as soon as we were out of the salon.

"Oh, would you like to ask Miss Slack?" I enquired in an innocent voice.

He clenched his lips and frowned. "I'm not a leper, you know," he said.

"No, indeed! She would be perfectly safe with you."

"Good night, Miss Denver."

"Good night, Your Grace."

I went back to the salon, laughing under my breath.

When I was in my bed, I realized that I had let him go with no real explanation for the men who had disappeared in his meadow. Nothing had been resolved, and it was difficult to account for the strange feeling of contentment that hung about me.

The day of Slack's party dawned fair and clear, a truly beautiful day. I made a quick trip into town without her in the morning to fetch her present—a small, but lovely diamond ring. It was an extravagant gift but she has been with me forever and is not likely to acquire one by any other means. Every woman ought at some time in her life to own a diamond ring.

There was a caller during my absence: Mr. McMasters who was still there upon my return.

"What brings you out our way?" I enquired.

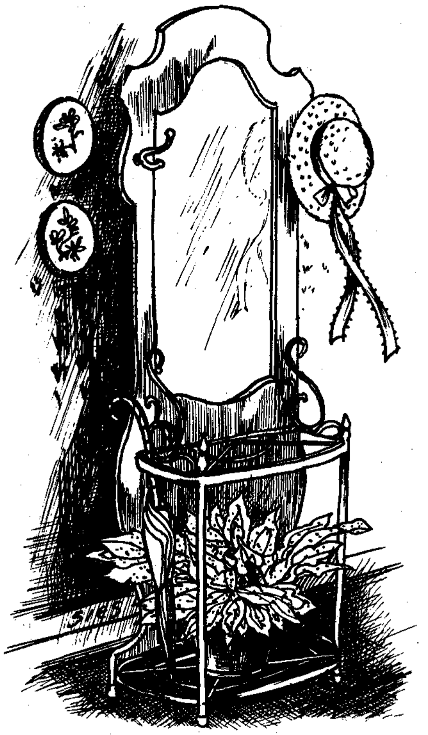
"I had to make a call at Belview and, as I was so close, wanted to say hello to you and Miss Slack."

I was eager to hear what took him to Belview and he was soon telling me.

"Our kitchen girl is leaving us, and we are looking for a replacement. Young Mary Hinks at Belview would like to come to us, and so I arranged it with the Duke. They had a spot of trouble while I was there. Billie McCormick gave his leg a hit while chopping wood, and the place was in an uproar. But the Duke put a tourniquet on him and rushed him into town, to the doctor. The leg will be all right, thank God, and in the meantime, of course, His Grace will give the family every support. He takes very good care of his own people."

"A pity he couldn't see his way fit to give Leo Milkin at the inn some financial support," I said.

"That character!" McMaster said. "He was Clavering's pensioner for over a year after he hurt his ankle in that mantrap. He can walk as well as anyone, but puts on his limp when he gets a gullible customer at the inn. It is all an act to get a sizeable tip."



Slack could hardly wait to get McMaster out the door before she brought up the Duke's redeemed character. I saw at once argument was useless and desisted, for I did not wish to spoil this special day with bickering.

I was planning to dress up in my new green silk. The fact that the material was contraband enhanced the gown's attraction in my eyes. I felt quite a renegade, a little reckless with my naked white shoulders. It was, I suppose, Clavering's remark that my green riding habit suited me that made me think of him as I turned in front of my mirror, admiring myself. I felt a little sorry he couldn't be seeing the outfit. A sparkling stone would have set it off to great advantage, but I possessed none, and hung my pearls around my neck.

Slack wore her best black crepe; Lady Inglewood in purple and George in evening dress arrived at six o'clock. We were sitting having a glass of wine when the knocker sounded. No one came in, but a parcel was delivered for Slack, a large one, and when the paper was torn off, it turned out to be a broken statue.

"Clavering!" I said, and laughed. "It serves you well for pretending to like such stuff, Slack," I teased her.

She refused to take offense at either the gift or my words, but instead was vastly pleased with it.

"What? How should Clavering know it is her birthday?" Lady Inglewood demanded at once.

"Why, we told him last night when he called, Aunt Ethelberta," I had the pleasure of informing her, and was soon at pains to let her know Clavering had not come empty-handed last night, either. "He brought Slack down a box of dried cherries. They are both very fond of them."

"Don't think you have a chance in the world of landing him, Priscilla. It is no such a thing. He will never marry a local girl, certainly not a schoolteacher's daughter, but will make some great match with an heiress in London."

"You hear that, Slack? You must look lively," I cautioned playfully.

My aunt gave George a look that commanded him to take a seat by my side and get busy making love to me, and til dinner was ready I had a bad time of it. She spoke to Slack about Clavering's present, telling her at last that it was just some old thing he had found lying about, and it was really an insult. I turned my full attention to George and let him woo me with talk of some new gun he had bought, and had uphill work making it sound like romance to his mother. Dinner was finer and fancier than we normally took, and after eating I proposed a toast to Slack, handing over her ring. She cried when she saw what it was.

"I didn't realize diamonds were the order of the day," Lady Ing said, handing Slack her box with a very poor grace. It was a netting box, which brought no tears of joy, but was received graciously. It was nine o'clock, and though it was the hour at which George often arrived, I could see that both he and his mama were rehearsing to take their leave. But before they managed to invent an excuse for leaving—the knocker sounded.

"That will be His Grace," Slack said, and jumped up to run into the hall to greet him.

They entered immediately, stopping in the archway. He bowed to Lady Ing and me, nodded to George, and entered.

"How maladroit of me, bursting in on a family party," he said, then turned to Slack. "You most particularly told me you were not entertaining this evening, Miss Slack, or I would not have come bothering you. There is nothing so unwanted as an uninvited guest, but I disliked to have your birthday pass without wishing you well."

"We were going to ask you to come, too, but were sure you would be busy," she gushed back.

"You were wrong," he said, leaning toward her and waving a finger under her nose. "I dined alone, thinking of you, and would have been delighted to come. So, you liked the statuette?"

"Immoderately!" she breathed happily.

"Lady Inglewood and George gave me this handsome netting box," she said, picking it up to show him.

"Very nice. Now tell me the big news. Which of your beaux gave you that diamond you are flashing around?"

She was pink and puffed with pleasure. "Miss Denver gave it to me. I don't know what possessed her to waste such a sum. I am very angry with her," she said, with a broad smile in my direction.

"I got in ahead of you!" I told him. "But you had your chance."

"One of your own many left-overs?" he quizzed. "You really ought not to accept the ring unless you mean to have the gentleman as well."

He came in and sat down between George and myself, and proceeded to flirt outrageously with Slack and me.

"You will be putting George's nose out of joint with talk of my niece accepting diamond rings from gentlemen," Aunt Ing said with a nod in our direction.

Clavering looked at me with a laughing question in his black eyes. "Indeed! I hadn't realized that was the way the wind blows. But I should have known when Miss Denver is so elegantly attired to entertain her cousin that there was romance in the air. She does not bother to dress up for *me,* you see."

"I am dressed up for Slack's birthday party," I said to the door, for I didn't feel up to looking at either of them.

"And looking very well, ma'am, if I neglected to mention it," Clavering said.

George, I believe, must have received a mute blast from his mama's direction, for he also said, "Yes, Cousin, dashed fine."

"Thank you, George."

"You didn't thank *me,*" the Duke pointed out.

"Thank you."

"You are most welcome." He bowed formally, only his eyes revealing a most charming glint of humor.

"How does friend grate go on?" he asked next. "Not likely to take a leap at me tonight, I trust?"

"No, it has been behaving well since I threatened it with Mr. Pickering."

"What's this? What's all this about Mr. Pickering? It seems to me you are wasting a deal of money, Priscilla, buying extravagant presents for servants and—"

"Miss Slack is not a servant."

"Well, she is not family."

"We consider Slack family," Clavering said in a proprietary way.

"Do *we* indeed?" she asked him, in a tone of heavy irony.

"Yes, we do!" I told her, not in defense of Clavering but because of my anger with her for offending Slack.

Clavering spoke on uninterrupted. "And while we are in the midst of this pleasant little family discussion, I mean to take you to task for selling Priscilla that wild nag, Lady Inglewood."

This was going too far. Priscilla! Talking as though he actually were a relative and not a virtual stranger. "Really!" I gasped, staring at him.

"I don't see it's anyone's business but our own if my niece and I arrange a bargain between us," Lady Ing told him, recovering her speech.

"I take a strong interest in your niece, ma'am, George notwithstanding, and I object," he answered reasonably.

"Well you may go to the devil!" I told him bluntly, just about fed up with his officiousness.

"All in good time," he agreed blandly.

"George is teaching her to ride," Lady Ing said.

"Yes, I have been told George has the monopoly in *that* sphere," Clavering replied mischievously.

"He will make certain nothing happens to her, and if you can't handle Juliette, Priscilla dear, I'm sure you have only to tell me, and we will make some other arrangement."

"I can handle her."

I suggested a glass of wine to bring harmony to the meeting, but achieved only a brief peace. "Let us propose a toast to Miss Slack," the Duke suggested. "Happy birthday, my dear, and may you have many more of them."

When my aunt next looked at her watch and said it was getting late, I didn't stir a finger to detain her. "Time we *all* should be going," she said with an imperative glare at Clavering.

"I stay up past ten o'clock myself, and if memory serves, you ladies do not retire with the hens, either; but don't let us detain *you,* Lady Inglewood," he answered, arising to see her out.

"I'll speak to you tomorrow, Priscilla," she said.

"You've been warned," he said aside to me, but in no low voice.

After the Inglewoods left, we celebrated in earnest with more wine—quite a good deal of it.

What was the meaning of that performance, Clavering?" I asked bluntly.

"Always happy to oblige a lady in distress."

"I was not in distress prior to your arrival."

"You are in distress one way or the other, my girl. If you want George, you need to give him some competition. And if you don't, I will make an excellent excuse to turn him off. Oh, I know I'm ugly as sin and twice as reprehensible, but I'm the richest gent in the parish."

"How nice for you."

"It softens the blow of having a face only a mother could love," he said, looking at me with his bold, black, gypsy eyes.

Slack made some clucking demurs to this self-insult; I did not, for what he said had some truth in it.

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Before you love,
Learn to run through snow
Leaving no footprint.

Edward Powys Mathers
Translation of a Turkish Proverb

"Don't you agree?" he asked, pointblank.

"Yes."

He threw back his head and laughed. "Well you're frank anyway. I must say, however, personal vanity is not one of my failings. Nor yours either, I think? This is the first time I have ever seen you dressed up a little."

It was the "a little" that rankled. I had never been more dressed up in my life. "And a lady who gives diamonds to her friends when she does not wear them herself surely sets a precedent for lack of vanity that will rarely be equaled."

"I don't quite shower them over all my friends. Slack is more than a friend to me. She is, well, a diamond herself, and a more valuable one than the stone she wears."

"I couldn't agree with you more. But we are causing our diamond to blush, become a rose diamond. Forgive us, Miss Slack. Next time we wish to puff you up, we shall take care you don't overhear us. The more sensitive among us dislike praise. I am not so sensitive myself." He stopped and looked around at us. "I see no one means to try me with a compliment."

"We heard you had a little trouble at Belview today," I remarked, trying to change the direction of the conversation. "Mr. McMaster stopped in and told us about Bill McCormick. How is he?"

"He'll do. The blood was flowing quite freely, but the bone wasn't touched. Mr. McMaster, you say, told you?"

"Yes, he stopped in on his way home."

"But Seaview isn't on his way home."

"Well, it is not far out of his way," I pointed out.

"Planning another trip to Eastbourne?" he asked, with a sly smile. "I wonder what the attraction is at Eastbourne, when Porchester does not draw you at all."

"It's the open carriage, Your Grace." Slack explained. "Mr. McMaster always brings his open carriage, to insure *my* staying at home, you see."

"He's not such a slow top as I thought," Clavering said, then looked around the room, as though searching for something. "You have no pianoforte here. Why have you no pianoforte, Priscilla? The food of love is quite lacking here."

"I should get one; Miss Slack plays very well," I replied.

"I have a clavichord at home that no one plays," he said. "Since getting the pianoforte the clavichord has been consigned to a dark corner unused, and probably completely out of tune, while the pianoforte has the place of honor, also unused and out of tune. If you would like to have the use of the clavichord, I will have it shipped down."

"Having an instrument to while away our evenings will only encourage us to stay about. You'll never be rid of us," I cautioned, while wondering furiously what he was up to.

"You notice I didn't offer the pianoforte. I'm hedging my bets; but as you seem determined to stay, we might as well have some music. And my friends call me Burne, by the way."

"What an odd name!" I said.

"Short for Wedderburne, my first name."

"Sounds heathen," Slack said, "Burne."

"Quite like an injunction to incinerate myself; but I prefer it to being regularly ordered to Wed, which is the alternative."

"You aren't in favor of marriage then?" Slack asked.

"While there are housetops to jump from, I don't see why anyone commits the folly."

"You won't get any argument from me," Slack said. "I have no opinion of it either."

"And you, Miss Denver, do you also agree with me?" he asked.

"Absolutely. Especially I think ladies are foolish to marry if they don't have to, for the advantage is all the man's. *He* continues free as a bird, but she becomes an unpaid housekeeper and bearer of children, while losing control of her fortune."

He blinked twice and looked from one of us to the other. "She gains a protector, and a certain position in society. The advantage is not all the man's. What would become of the human race if everyone thought as *you* do?"

He settled back with a satisfied smile and continued to argue the point from whichever point of view suited him and made lively discussion. For an hour we discussed half-formed theories of raising children in houses with paid guardians, while the adult population ran about, the men unshaved and the women unlaced, both free to do pretty well as they pleased. Slack expressed some interest in changing her skirts for trousers, which led me to comment that it was my desire to be rid of my curls and have convenient short tresses like a man. Clavering had more trouble than we in hiding his horror at these notions, but would not for the world say so. We drank a good deal of wine, those two devoured many dried cherries, and before he left, the Duke also had a piece of Slack's birthday cake. He urged us to go to his library *ad lib,* promised he would send down the clavichord as soon as he had it tuned, and finally left.

"He's an interesting talker; I'll say that for him," Slack said when he was gone.

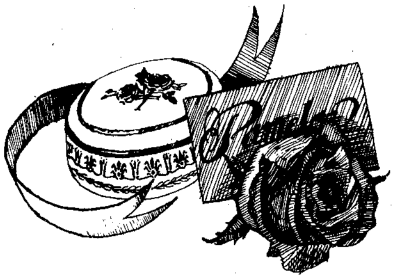
"He's as crooked as a dog's hind leg," I added. "He thinks to become our friend and get Willow Hall from us. You catch more flies with honey than with vinegar, but he won't catch us."

"I wonder," Slack said, and laughed archly.

The next morning Slack went in the carriage to borrow books on Roman antiquities, and I remained home to deal alone with Lady Inglewood, who came to inform me I was wasting my time decking myself out in harlot's gear to win the Duke of Clavering. The visit had the unfortunate effect of increasing George's calls to spy on the Duke and me and see just how much time he actually spent with us.

During the days that followed, I became a more skillful rider and Slack pursued her scholarship. Clavering gave her every encouragement in this new hobby. He came often at night to peruse the books with her. They were now just plain Burne and Slack to each other, all formality abandoned. I became "Prissie" to them both, a name I abhor; I occasionally called Clavering "Wed" to annoy him, but when he once remarked, "I begin to get the idea," I ceased.

The whole autumn had been beautiful, with more sun than we ever got at Wiltshire, and one afternoon I decided to ride alone. I had had a lesson with George in the morning, and planned to go to Pevensey with Slack later, but she had to dash to Belview to borrow yet another book—and so a lovely rose gown I had ordered remained at Miss Savage's shop, and it was to be finished that day.



I became bored with the garden and decided to canter through Clavering's thicket. It is closer than my aunt's fields. Besides, she had dropped the hint she disliked a great deal of traffic in the park, as she was trying to grow some decent lawns there. I had permission to use the trap-free thicket, and intended no more than to run through it once or twice on the footpath, but it happened that a stupid hare—there are many on Clavering's property, due to his having killed his foxes—dashed across our path, and what should Juliette do but take a fright and break into one of her wild gallops. I was first only frightened, thinking I could control her, as she had occasionally pulled this trick on me before. When she got to the end of the thicket, she went mad with the vast expanse of meadow that suddenly opened up before her, and went galloping off into that trap-infested area at a hair-raising speed.

It was the fear of traps that made me panic. I envisioned one opening its maw and snapping onto her legs, myself being thrown wildly and breaking my head or a leg, or falling into another trap. I thought of them as being littered every few yards, but this was not true. We didn't see one during our whole gallop.

There soon arose before us a few remains of gray walls, the ruined chapel of Belview. I knew this to be the area particularly heavily trapped, and felt that if we were to be caught, this was where it would happen. I was irrational with fear, and hardly knew what I was seeing. I did catch, out of the corner of my eye, the sight of two men talking, and saw they had mounts standing by. Remembering the men who were to clear out the excavation for rebuilding, I assumed it was these workmen and shouted to them for help. The larger jumped on to a black stallion and came after me. The other also ran to his mount, but it was farther away and it was the first who I hoped would rescue me. I soon heard him clattering behind me, gaining on me in spite of Juliette's heart-pounding speed. He was soon at my side and reaching but one strong arm. I thought that I was meant to throw myself on to his arm to break my fall. What he was really trying to do was grab the reins and bring my horse to a stop. His arm moved beyond my grasp as I leapt, and I went falling perilously into a maelstrom of flying hooves and heaving flanks. There was very little time to consider it, a second or two, but in retrospect I realize I faced death. A hoof on the temple might well have killed me.

Miraculously, I felt only some slight discomfort in my left hip, which had taken the brunt of the fall. The second man had now dismounted and was at my side. I was alive; I was well, but was seized with a spasm of trembling at the shock of the ordeal, and could not speak. Then the man beside me was feeling gingerly with his fingers in my hair, my scalp, for blood or bumps, lifting my arms, feeling my body. I could hear him breathe rapidly and heavily, but he said nothing. I tried to open my lips to speak, and became unconscious. When I revived, I was being carried off somewhere. I knew not where, nor did I care. Nothing hurt. It was warm and peaceful and safe being carried along. Someone was looking after me; it was all that mattered. I was a little annoyed when I again heard horses approaching from behind us.

"Go to the house and get the gig," the man carrying me said in a familiar voice. But it sounded strained as though it came from a distance.

"What about the horses?" the other man asked. I had not heard that voice before. It was deep, rough.

"Take them home. All of them, especially that fool mare of Inglewood's."

"Aye, aye, sir," the second voice replied.

"And Lou—better send the gig with a groom. She might not have recognized you. I'll meet you later."

"Where are you taking her?" the sailor asked.

"I'll wait at the ruins."

"Righto." I heard the jingling harnesses and then the sound of horses leaving. I was very glad the interruption was over and I could go to sleep.

I awakened some time later to find myself laid down on a strip of grass—but not on the ground. There was a wall behind me, and the clear blue sky above. I was on a ledge with a grass surface, some feature of the ruined chapel. There was a coat—Clavering's evidently—tucked around me, inhibiting the movement of my arms. I turned my head to the right and saw Clavering glowering above me with a face that would have curdled cream. "You damned fool," he said harshly.

It seemed inordinately cruel that he should swear at me when I was so tired. I didn't even feel angry at this treatment. I was too tired. I closed my eyes again.

"Priscilla! Prissie, are you all right?" he demanded.

Let him worry, I thought, and lay comfortably back, unresponsive. But I was not to be allowed my hard-earned rest. "Speak to me," he said angrily.

I was infinitely tired. I thought I might sleep forever, but felt my eyelids flutter open of their own volition, and still that grim, angry face swam before me, not ten inches away.

"Do you recognize me?" he asked.

How should I not know him, when he had been all but living at my house the past week? "Kn-know you?" I asked, intending irony, but hearing a weak, infant's pulling voice issue from my lips.

"It's Clavering," he said, in a hard, taut voice.

I tried to lift my lids, but they weighed a ton each.

"Damn you're not going to die on me," he growled, and lifted my poor tired head from the grass. "Look at me!"

I was much inclined to obey to silence him, but could not.

"Priscilla, speak to me! *Say something!*" he commanded sternly. The loud voice hurt my head.

LOVE IS A BIRD

by Elise Barese

Love is a bird,
Hold it too loose, it flies
Clasp it too close, it dies.

Love is a bird,
If free to leave the nest
Wings back to love's own breast.

"Be quiet," I managed to get out, very weakly.

"You'll live," he said, and laughed, also weakly, then returned my head to its resting place.

With a very uncomfortable rustling about, Clavering sat down at my head, and then lifted it to ease his lap under me. He made a very poor pillow, and my peace was further disturbed by having his hands pass over my cheeks and through my hair, while a continuous stream of vicious blandishments were poured over me.

"It serves you right. I have *repeatedly* told you you couldn't handle that damned nag. You're lucky she didn't trample you. I hope you've learned your lesson once and for all. Damn that lackey! What's taking him so long?" Then in a tone only a shade softer, "Does it hurt anywhere, Priss? Are you in pain? We'll soon have you home. Where *is* that gig? Dear God, we must have been waiting half an hour!" That was the nature of his soothing comfort. Abuse, liberally interspersed with profanity and curses on our servants.

Finally the unfortunate person chosen for the chore arrived. "Where's the blanket?" Clavering demanded, arising quickly, but not quite throwing my head to the grass.

There was an apologetic muttering about the absence of a blanket, followed by a fresh string of curses sworn off on the stupidity of servants. "Pass the brandy. She's as white as snow." More apologetic mutterings. "Well, there's some in the . . . Oh, hell, never mind. Help me lift her . . . take her feet . . . gently, she's not a side of beef."

I felt very like one by the time I was stowed in the cart. Clavering managed the single horse with one hand, and held me on to the seat beside him with the other, for I was partially revived and could sit up. We joggled through the meadow into the thicket, where branches of bushes brushed against our sides.

I believe it was his intention to carry me bodily into Willow Hall from the stables, but I was sufficiently myself by that time that I forbad such nonsense. I shrugged myself out of his jacket and suggested he put it on before he contracted lung fever, if he hadn't already. He returned it to my shoulders and firmly buttoned two of its buttons, clamping my arms to my sides beneath it, then put his arm around my back. In this extremely uncomfortable manner we negotiated the few yards to the kitchen door, which he entered bellowing for Slack.

"Be quiet! You'll scare her out of her wits," I said sharply.

"That's twice today you've hushed me up. Fine thanks for saving your life."

"It was the other man who saved my life, and very awkwardly he did it, too."

"I'm happy to see you're returning to normal," he said.

Slack came rushing along and looked closer to fainting than I was myself. She insisted on adding to my discomfort by grabbing my other side, but despite them both I made it to the salon and the sofa.

"The doctor! We must call the doctor at once!" she babbled.

"I don't need a doctor."

"Call him," Clavering decreed. "And get some wine."

She darted off, returning with the wine bottle and no glass. Clavering tipped the bottle to my lips. He tipped my head back and a great cascade of wine, too much for my mouth to hold, flowed forth, down my chin, and over my riding habit, bringing me to spluttering rigidity in an upright position.

"Get away before you drown me. I'm not hurt and I don't want a doctor, either. Give me your handkerchief."

"You remembered not to say 'please.' You must be recovering," he said, and pulled out a handkerchief to dab at my chin, but as my bosom was also well doused, handed it to me. No sooner had I dabbed up the excess, lamenting the ruin of my jacket, than I was summarily pushed back against the pillows.

"Your turn to be quiet." He looked about the room for a blanket, and finding none grabbed Slack's gray-purple shawl to throw over me.

"I am not in the least cold. I'm hot," I said, pushing it away.

"You are suffering from shock. Wine and warmth are the treatment," he said, putting the shawl back on and lifting the bottle again. I had the wits to steady it myself this time, and got a mouthful without spilling the rest of the bottle. It was then I noticed his shaking hand. It was trembling like a leaf in the wind.

"What's the matter with you?" I asked. "Have you got the trembles? You've been drinking too much."

"I haven't been drinking enough," he replied, and took the remainder of the bottle for himself, still without a glass.

Slack returned to find him at this genteel pastime, and ran off for a goblet, leaving him free to continue the sermon on my amazing display of stubbornness in insisting on trying to ride Juliette. "I have told you a dozen times . . . " he began.

"No, Your Grace, you have told me *at least* a hundred times, and I am mighty tired of hearing it. I had not the skill to handle her. I should not have persisted against your omniscient warnings. *Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa,* and Amen."

"You're not to try it again."

"Never again. I'll give her back to Lady Inglewood, and may she break her head as she nearly did mine."

"Why you took it into your empty head to throw yourself off a runaway animal in full gallop when you had managed to hold on to your seat that long is beyond me. Next time—"

"There isn't going to be a next time. I have heeded your dozens of warnings."

Slack came back with the glasses just as the bottle was emptied, and was scurrying off for another bottle, but Clavering called her back. "Tell me what happened," she said to him, and he proceeded to give her a highly colored and totally inaccurate account of my mishap.

I sighed, defeated, and closed my eyes. They decided it was rest the invalid now required, and fell silent. I heard a chair being brought to the edge of the sofa and someone sat down. When I felt my cover being straightened and the hair brushed from my forehead, I assumed it was Slack and reached out for her hand.

"Too late," Clavering said, as I tried to jerk away, and he held on to it tightly.

I looked around the room for Slack, but she had deserted us. "She's gone to see to boiling water," he told me.

"I'm not having a baby," I pointed out.

"I'm glad to hear it," was his unfeeling reply.

I should have had an answer, but was suddenly too tired. I was dizzy from the fall and perhaps the wine, gulped down in haste. I think I slept, or rested anyway. Later Slack came in and told me the doctor was delayed, but would come around after dinner.

"That is totally unnecessary," I told her, and sat up. Finding no reeling in my head, I put my feet on the floor and pushed aside the shawl.

"Are you hungry?" Slack asked. "It's nearly dinner time, but I didn't have the table laid."

"No, I'm not hungry."

"You have something, Maude," Clavering told her. "I'll stay with Priss. Better for her not to eat till the doctor comes."

She left, the idea being that they would take shifts minding me as if I were an unruly child or wayward moonling.

"How did you come to be there, at the chapel with that man?" I asked.

"I am having it shored up, the loose stones mortared into place for safety's sake."

"Lazy Louie isn't a stone mason. He's a smuggler."

"That wasn't Lazy Louie."

"Yes, it was. I've seen him on that big black stallion before, and you called him Louie, too."

"How do you come to know an unsavory character like that?"

"I don't know him, except by sight, but *you* seem to be on much better terms with him. What was he doing there?"

"I told you. His uncle from Hythe does that sort of work, and Louie is going to get him to come to me. He was looking it over for his uncle, to give him an idea of the nature of the job."

◆

With the first dream that comes with
the first sleep
I run, I run, I am gathered to thy heart.

Alice Meynell
Renouncement

"Why did you say it wasn't him?"

"I was afraid you'd take it into your head to go thanking him the next time you see him, and he is not the sort of fellow you ought to be talking to."

"Really? What are you up to, Clavering?"

"Rescuing maidens in distress, and being given a hard time for it."

"And there was brandy, too."

"Louie always reeks of brandy. An occupational hazard."

"No, I don't mean I smelled it. You said something. You asked the groom for brandy. What would you be doing with brandy at Belview? You shouldn't buy smuggled brandy."

"I don't. Someone gave me a bottle, which I keep for medicinal purposes."

"And when he hadn't brought it, you said there was some—somewhere else . . ."

"You were dreaming. I said nothing of the sort. You were supposed to be unconscious. Why were you frightening the life out of me if you were wide awake the whole time?"

"I wasn't wide awake, worse luck. Only half."

He didn't say a word, but I noticed his eyes flickering to the grate in a worried way.

"Burne, what is it about?" I asked, hoping to entice him into telling me by using a dulcet tone and his preferred name, for it was becoming plain that something strange was afoot.

"What do you mean?" he asked, unseduced by either tone or name.

"I mean your meeting with that man, and having brandy, and lying about it. I mean men disappearing in your meadow, and your talk of building a Roman temple when there aren't enough stones there to build a decent-sized dog house. And certainly not enough stone to protect at the cost of mantraps. And another thing: I never fall into a trap in that meadow. That's twice now I've been there, and never a sign of a trap."

"I'll see if I can't arrange to place one in your way next time you go sniffing about."

"That's not an answer."

"Actually it's not the few stones I want to protect; it's the Roman foundation around those few stones above ground. There's a piece of mosaic floor in fairly good condition for one thing."

"That doesn't explain anything."

"What are you suggesting?" he asked. "That I am in league with Lazy

Louie smuggling brandy from France? Would you like a keg?" he asked in a conspiratorial voice.

"No, but I don't doubt you could arrange it if I did. For medicinal purposes, of course."

"Anyone in the village could arrange it. Your friend McMaster would be happy to help you. My views on the matter are generally known, and I might have a little more trouble than others."

"I wasn't accusing you of *smuggling*, Clavering. Is there buried treasure in the meadow—is that it?"

"Yes, a priceless Roman mosaic. What idiotic notion have you hatched now, Prissie?"

It did sound rather idiotic all of a sudden, and I rapidly changed to another point of some little mystery. "You said a long time ago, when you asked us to Belview, that you would be going back to London very soon, to Parliament. What keeps you on here?"

"Do you really have to ask?"

"Don't try to pretend it's me and Slack."

"Slack has nothing to do with it, but don't, pray, tell her I have been leading her on."

"Neither have I anything to do with it. And you haven't raised your offer for Seaview for weeks, either."

"I have thought of a cheaper way to get it."

"I knew that was what you were up to! I told Slack so."

"Did you indeed?"

"You've been trying to deceive us that you're our friend, so that we'll be beholden to you."

"Well upon my word! I knew you were the most stubborn woman God ever created, but this is the first time I ever realized the extent of your conniving, scheming brain—and laying the whole of it in *my* lap, if you please. It would not have occurred to me to manipulate you in that underhanded way. *My* scheming—if it even merits the word after what you have thought— is quite open and aboveboard."

"Except for the part of it that takes place underground with Roman mosaics, or in secluded meadows with smugglers. Never mind. We'll argue tomorrow. My head aches."

"I won't be here tomorrow."

"You're not leaving."

He smiled softly and took my hand. "Do you know, I think that is the first nice thing you've ever said to me, and the strain of uttering it has given you a migraine. I shall be back soon."

"What was nice about it?" I asked, for I had certainly intended no compliment.

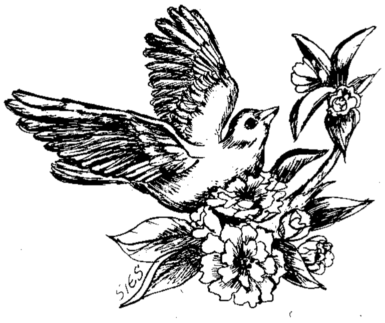
"The anxious tone, Priss. Very nice."

"I was not anxious."

"You don't have to apologize. *Au contraire.*"

There was no point in arguing with him, and besides, my head did ache. Slack was back within minutes, carrying a tray for Clavering; the first meal he had ever taken with us, and what a ramshackle meal it was, sitting alone at a card table in a corner. He remained till the doctor came. After a brief examination, the doctor left a quite unnecessary sleeping draught, which I never did take. As soon as Dr. Sloane was gone, Clavering, too, arose to take his leave. Slack, with some misguided idea of tact, decided to leave us alone, for which I upbraided her severely later.

Privacy was not in the least necessary for our last words. "Recover quickly," was his parting solicitude, delivered in his customary curt, commanding way.



"I am recovered."

"Stay out of the meadow. Pity, I would like very much to stay and wrestle with you—verbally, of course. Recuperate!" he ordered, punctuating his command with a pointing finger; then he turned and left the room.

I overheard him talking to Slack in ths hall. "Take care of her," he said. "I'll be back as soon as I can."

As Slack made no startled exclamation, I assumed she had been told before of his leaving. "I'll keep Juliette at Belview till I return. I wouldn't put it past her to try the wretch again to spite me."

Luckily for Slack, I couldn't make out her answer, but I heard him laughing. "But that is exactly what I like about her," he said. "Birds of a feather, we two." Then the outer door closed, and Slack came back to me, looking suspiciously innocent. I would have given another diamond ring to know what he had said.

The next day I was up and about, but was content to remain indoors. Lady Inglewood and George came to call, which is the only reason I bothered having a relapse in the afternoon. Slack told them the story and Lady Inglewood offered to buy back Juliette. I expect she was missing her rides.

With nothing better to do, I glanced through a few of the many books Slack had borrowed from Clavering. One dealt with the forts of the Saxon shore, and I was interested to learn there were the remains of one at Pevensey. Also curious, they were not normally spaced so close together as to allow of another at Willow Hall, only three miles away. In fact, I realized at once that it was unlikely in the extreme that what we were built on was an old fort at all; it must be some other Roman ruin.

Pleased that I was showing any interest in her hobby, Slack surrounded me with a wall of books dealing with Roman art, trade, politics and religion. Had I had the time or interest to read the half of them, I would have been an expert, but I had not the least intention of sharing her mania.

On the second day, I drove into Pevensey to fetch my rose satin gown, with a little misgiving as to what Slack would say when she observed the daring neckline and lack of sleeves. I looked about sharply for Lazy Louie, for whatever Clavering had to say on the subject, I felt I owed him my thanks. He was not to be seen anywhere, and later Officer Smith, of whom I inquired at the customs office, told me the *Nancy Jane* had slipped away a day ago, and he would keep an eye peeled for its return. I also inquired of Lazy Louie's last name, for I seemed to remember Smith's having mentioned it once, and I thought I ought to address him as Mr. Something when I met him.

"He's a FitzHugh," Smith said, with a sly smile that told me there was some significance in the name. A question caused him to elaborate.

"One of old Lord Hugh's—er—offspring."

"Who is Lord Hugh?" I asked. It was not unlike trying to extract information from George.

"Why, he was uncle to the Duke of Clavering, the father's younger brother. Long since buried, but the countryside hereabouts bears many a trace of him, if you know what I mean," he said roguishly. "He did better for most of them than he did for Louie, but the lad was a renegade from the beginning and there was no making him respectable."

The illustrious Duke of Clavering, half a cousin to Lazy Louie, that "unsavory character" too low for me to speak to. A smuggler, a bastard and a renegade. How I would crow when next we met. There was no reason to doubt Smith's story. I had even thought I glimpsed some small similarity between them. "It doesn't bother you then?" Smith asked, with an inquisitive face. The question left me speechless.

"Why should it bother *me*?" I asked.

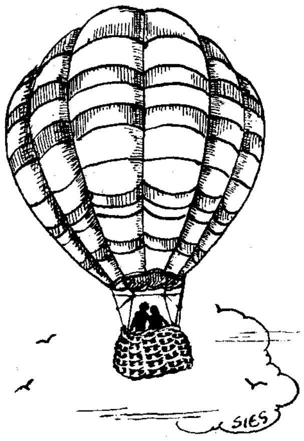
Till I was out of his office, I held in my secret delight. This discovery was of more worth to me than my new rose satin gown, which I think might warrant a warmer description than being "dressed up a little." Not that I had any place to wear such a dashing ensemble, unless someone should decide to hold a ball. For the next few days there was no ball, nor any excitement of any sort save a visit from Mr. McMaster. With my rides discontinued, George was coming to find our visits as dull as I always had. He had no excuse now to talk horses, and curtailed his calls to a very agreeable twenty minutes. Lady Inglewood came once to see what she could find out about our dealings with Clavering, and was so vexed to see his clavichord in my salon that she didn't return. His being safely away in London may have lessened her vigilance, and in any case from Wednesday on we saw no sign of her. I was glad for I was still convalescing and with so little I could do, I turned to books, like Slack, and read of the glories of Roman Britain.

The war against Napoleon dragged on. Since Wellington's victory at Vittoria in June, he had been advancing on the French frontier. It was hoped he would soon be in France. And with Napoleon's army weakened from the Russian battles, and with the Prussian War of Liberation using what men and guns he had left, we were hopeful of victory at last. I did not really fear invasion; it was not spoken of locally as being at all a likely thing. Still, with Napoleon, one could never be sure. England's armies, too, were largely dispersed elsewhere, and the possibility could never be ignored entirely. The round Martello Towers were a welcome safeguard, but a reminder as well.

I became impatient with our dull routine. Slack did nothing to soothe my exacerbated nerves. Coy remarks that I was "lonely" and that we might take a jaunt up to London were treated with the contempt they deserved, but we did make some half-hearted plans for visiting Brighton the next summer. This sent Slack dashing up to Belview to see what she could discover of its older name, and what she might find of interest to a historian like herself. She learned at Belview that the Duke was expected home "soon," and got it pinned down a little more firmly that I what his "soon" meant.

"Tomorrow or the day after; before the next week definitely. They say he's never away above a week," she said.

While Slack was gone, I decided to take a walk, and chose to walk through the thicket. As I approached the far end of it, I went just a little distance into the meadow, to see if there was any sign of Louie's uncle working on the ruins. I was very careful of traps, looking with a sharp eye before every footstep. I could see in the distance one mount, a dappled gray which I did not recognize, nor did I see any sign of its rider. There was no work going on. The ruins stood in a flat field, and scaffolds or piles of equipment or mortar or cement must have been visible had they been there. Being a little frightened of both traps and drunken stonemasons, I turned my steps around and went back home.



A rather vicious storm blew up that night. Already at dinnertime it was dark and cool. We lit the fire in the grate and settled in for a comfortable evening with our books. The grate had been silent as a mouse for some time now, and we had become complacent about it, but at nine o'clock it began to tremble a little, and we exchanged silent expressions of chagrin.

It rattled again, and Slack said, "Not that business again," voicing my sentiments exactly. We set our jaws for trouble, but there was actually little enough to complain of—a few minor jiggles that might well have been caused by the howling winds outside.

I had, of course, told her the moment I returned from Pevensey some days previously about Clavering's relationship to Lazy Louie. Without knowing a single thing about it, she denied all kinship. For that matter, she personally hadn't a thing against smuggling, and neither did I, apparently. I bought up every scrap of silk the drapery shop had for sale, yards and yards of it, in all shades of the rainbow.

"Clavering's cousin won't be coming home tonight, either," I said.

"You refer to Lazy Louie, his *alleged* half-cousin, do you?"

"Yes, the bastard-smuggler of the family."

"Such talk is not becoming in a lady, Priscilla, and I'm sure I don't know what Burne would say if you carry on so."

"Neither do I, but I'm dying to find out."

"Well, he's right about you is all I can say," she retorted sharply.

"What did he say?" I asked, ready for battle.

She sniffed and snorted for a few moments, but eventually I got it out of her. "He said you were always fixing for a fight with him, and so you are."

"Did he, indeed? Gallant of him."

"And he's not much better if it comes to that. Birds of a feather."

Oh yes, he would hear my views on Lazy Louie all right. Slack knew there was no point trying to talk me out of it, and suggested a little music instead. But after a short musical interlude, Slack said, "I'm for bed. I feel a touch of a headache. Not that I'll sleep with that storm going on outside."

She was holding her head, and this indicated one of her bad headaches, which come to trouble her once or twice a year. "Why don't you take a few drops of that sleeping draught the doctor left for me? It will give you a good night's sleep."

"I think perhaps I will. A good thing I didn't throw it away."

We both went up to bed early, but I was not at all tired. I lit a brace of candles and read till close to midnight, and was still not sleepy. I decided to find myself a good, romantic novel and indulge in a bout of emotion. There was no proper library at Seaview, but in the morning parlor there were a few bookshelves built in under the window, and I remembered seeing the telltale marble-covered books denoting the Minerva Press. I slipped into my dressing gown and house slippers to go downstairs.

My salon is to the right of the staircase as one descends, and I took a peek in to see if the embers had burned themselves out so that I might close the flue, for it was still raining, but more gently now.

I neither heard nor suspected a thing amiss till I took up the poker to stir the embers, now cold. Then I heard it: the old familiar rattling of the grate. Certainly nothing except a human voice could have produced the echoing laugh that I heard. I could feel a prickling sensation on my scalp, along my neck and spine, right down to my toes. Then I noticed we had left the lid of the parson's bench open after getting out some music and, strange and impossible as it was, a second burst of laughter came right out of the parson's bench. I hurried to it, and looked in at an innocent varnished chest bottom, with one magazine lying there.

I lifted out the magazine and examined the floor of the bench carefully. It had an indentation, a groove large enough for four fingers along the left end. My taper trembling in my left hand, I put my fingers of the right hand into the groove, and it lifted as silently and easily as though it were on oiled hinges, though in fact it was not attached at all. It was a loose piece of wood, varnished, and resting on a protruding framework beneath. Without a sound I took it out and laid it on the floor, and knelt down with the taper above my head to examine what was revealed below the now-bottomless bench. There was a pair of narrow steps leading into pitch blackness, and there was quite distinctly the sound of more than one voice coming in a muted fashion up from the blackness. They must have been coming from some excavation just outside the walls of my house.

So I had found my secret passageway at last, right where Pickering thought it was.

I sat back on my heels, breathing in light, fearful gasps. Who was it? The foolish thought of long-dead Roman centurions or soldiers gambling there flashed into my head. I was torn by the conflicting desires to dash upstairs to my room, and at the same time to summon up my courage and descend the stairs. I don't know how long I knelt there, but when I finally stood up my feet were numb and cramped. The voices finally died out.

I should call Slack and Wilkins, I thought when it became totally silent and my imagination settled down. And what would I tell them? That I had heard ghosts laughing behind a closed door? For an eternity I stood thinking, listening, trying to decide what to do; then I remembered Slack had taken a sleeping draught, and I really could not go to Wilkins's door in the middle of the night in my dressing gown.

It would have to wait till morning for a thorough investigation, but my curiosity would not let me leave without just taking a peek into the blackness. Whoever had been there was gone now—for a long time I had not heard a sound. I would venture down the stairs, just a little way to see if I could discover a door. I would not be seen, even if there was someone still there.

I held my skirts up with one hand, my candelabrum in the other, rather wishing I had a third for the poker, and walked daintily down the narrow little staircase. Before I was halfway down I saw a door. It looked so harmless that I was emboldened to try the knob. A plain white porcelain knob, much as those abovestairs. I tried it.

The door was locked, and still no sound came from beyond it, so whoever had been there had left, and it would be an ideal time to enter—if only the door weren't locked. Sufficient sense had returned to me that I no longer thought of Roman centurions, but English desperados of some kind. I rattled the knob harder, turned and rattled it several times, but it held. As I was about to turn and go back up the stairs, it pulled suddenly, noiselessly, into the black cavern beyond, and a short, dark stranger with an evil face stood pointing a gun at my eyes.

He wore a black toque, dark and rough clothing. *"Entrez, mam'selle,"* he said in a deep, calm voice.

A Frenchman! A Roman soldier would hardly have surprised me more. But this man was no soldier, nor was he a dream. He was very solid flesh and blood, and he did not mean to be disobeyed.

I didn't say a word, or try to. Quick as a lizard, he had a steely hand on my wrist and was dragging me beyond the door, roughly and with determination. I opened my mouth to scream, to direct one desperate appeal up the stairway, and felt a hand clamp over my mouth even as he kicked the door shut behind us. The candelabrum went hurtling to the floor, narrowly missing my skirt in the process. One taper remained burning, and with a flash of his black arm, the man had pulled the one candle out and held it up to examine me. *"Silence!"* he decreed, in French. He took one step backwards and slid a bolt on the door. It didn't make a sound, which accounted for my not having heard him slide it open a moment before; but this time he was sliding it shut, barricading me into a dark, dank room with him. He stood now perhaps two feet away—looking, moving the candle up and down to allow a view of my face and dressing gown in a bold and deliberate way. *"Charmante,"* he decided.

Whatever I had feared prior to this—being beaten, tied up, killed perhaps—my fears took a sudden jolt in a different direction. He looked lecherous, eyeing me hungrily.

"Asseyez-vous, mam'selle!" he said, and stepped back to reveal two barrels lined up against a stone wall.Of course they were full of brandy —the man was a smuggler. Two warring nations could always work in harness for criminal profit, and he must have English allies. I made no move to accept the proffered seat. I stood mesmerized like a moth by a flame.

While these discoveries were being made, I was already thinking of escape. If anyone chanced into the salon he would see the open bench and come down the stairs. And be confronted with a locked door. And no one would enter

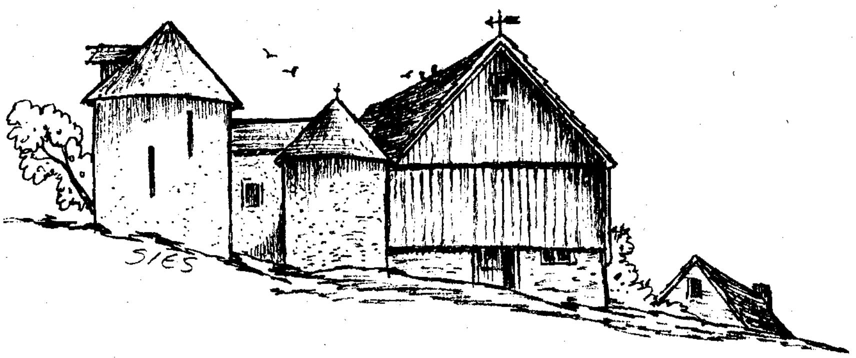
LOVE

by G. Jackman

Love is the bouncing ball of the sun
Warming the moon to day
Love is the fingers of evening breeze
Asking the trees to play
Love is the fastness of velvet night
Wrapped round a hidden creek
Love is all these and more, my love,
And of that I cannot speak

Love is the prowling pride of the cat
Gorging on fallen prey
Love is the clear pool that passing clouds
Turn into curds and whey
Love is the straw and silk of the birds
Brought home in tight-clenched beak
Love is all these and more, my love,
And of that I cannot speak

I glory to stand in the warmth of
your smile
Watching my moonbeams play
Hide and seek with your slivers of light
As gloaming fades to day
I turn with pride to welcome you in
Your hand against my cheek
And I stir with joy when you wrap me
round—
And of that I cannot speak



the salon before morning. Oh God—*hours* away, while this black-eyed reptile devoured me.

"Asseyez-vous, mam'selle!" he repeated, more sharply now.

I sat fearfully on the edge of the barrel nearer me. He sat on the other, closer than I liked.

"Parlez-vous français?" he asked, the voice calm again.

"Un peu," I answered, a little. Fear made my voice shake.

"Ah, bon! Vous êtes toute à fait charmante." A hand came out and stroked my cheek. I lifted my head quickly away but he forced it back. He looked into my eyes and laughed a deep, anticipatory chuckle.

"Les anglaises," he said mockingly, almost caressingly.

A million thoughts jumbled through my poor brain. Fear was uppermost and escape not far behind.

The lone taper gave only a very weak illumination. I saw stone walls about, with one on the far side that looked to be of some other material, smoother, lighter; on my right was a yawning black hole. Was it a tunnel? And if so, how long, and where did it exit? Would I meet the rest of the band if I tried that exit? I half worried that other smugglers would come, and half wished they would, for there was something ominous in being alone with this amorous Frenchman. I recalled, too, the various tales I had heard about these "Gentlemen"—so wrongly named.

This smuggler was French, and at the height of the war with France I had heard many tales of the rapacity and viciousness of the French. Clavering had said they would be likely to single out two unprotected women. He had been right all along.

This brought to mind Lazy Louie, and I found myself wondering if I would have to deal with him, too, before the night was over. Oh, how I wished I had thanked him, had ingratiated myself. But merely to claim friendship with him at this moment might delay my fate, and I decided to try it.

"Monsieur FitzHugh, Monsieur Louis FitzHugh est mon ami. Je le connais très bien," I said.

He threw his head back and laughed raucously. This gave him a very poor idea of my character, indeed, and before I knew what was happening, one black arm had shot out to encircle my waist and pull me to my feet. Simultaneously, I heard heavy footsteps approaching, and before long my good old friend Lazy Louie hunched through the yawning black hole that I had hoped would be my exit. I stared at him in horror. Like the Frenchman, he wore a black toque and dark clothing. He looked at us, struck dumb momentarily.

"Damn you, man!" Louie shouted, and rushed forward to pull the Frenchman away by violent force, and push him quite unceremoniously against the wall.

"Are you all right, Miss?" he asked, with horror glowing in his eyes. In that moment, I loved him. I felt like throwing myself against his massive chest and weeping, but years of self-control overcame my urge and I only drooped. He put out an arm to steady me; I didn't flinch, but grabbed it. This time his arm did not fail me. It held firmly. "He didn't—didn't *molest* you, did he?" he asked fearfully.

The Frenchman entered into a string of what I took to be protestations of innocence. I didn't understand him; he used words found in no French grammar, but it seemed Louie was familiar with the more idiomatic phrases. He listened with interest then said, "God in heaven, she's the *Dook's* chicken—*l'amie de Monsieur le Duc*. He'll *kill* you!" he warned. *"Tuez-mort!"* Then he made a cutting gesture across his own throat that was quite unmistakable. "I'd better get the Dook," he said to me, but uncertainly.

"He is not at home. He's in London," I said.

"He's home," Louie said, with conviction.

I was sufficiently alert now to wonder how Louie should know this, but it would be a matter of some interest to the smugglers perhaps, and I didn't quibble with the idea of getting him, if he was home. "Very well. Get him. I'll wait at home."

Louie frowned again, in uncertainty. I realized that while he reacted quickly in a physical way, he was slow-witted. "I can't let you go," he said simply.

"You can't leave me here with that animal!" I pointed to the Frenchman, who suddenly looked rather harmless, slouching in a corner.

"Yes, but I can't let you go, and the Dook might not come back here for hours."

"He will be coming *here—back here?*" I asked, while a thousand new questions arose. He had known all along. *He was one of them.*

"Damn, Miss Denver, what are we to do?" Louie asked, like a puzzled schoolboy. "I think I ought to fetch him."

"Take me with you."

"In your nightgown?" he asked, scandalized. I had forgotten this detail—not that it would have stopped me from going. "I won't be gone a minute. You tell the Frenchie you're the Dook's girl, and he won't lay a hand on you."

"Don't you dare go and leave me!" I shouted, but he was already gone, back into the black hole and down the passage. I looked at the Frenchman, and he looked at me, measuringly.

"Ne me touchez pas. Le Duc est mon ami. Très bon ami," I told him.

He sat down, lit a foul-smelling cigar, and sulked. I arose boldly and retrieved the candelabrum from the floor, relit the other tapers and began walking around the room to see what it was. It had a dirt floor and three stone walls. The third wall had once been muraled on plaster, I thought. Faint traces of outline were visible in the poor light. A painted series of arches, and the outline of a flowing gown in one of the arches. An unlikely decoration for a fort—which of course this was not. There were two straw mattresses on the floor, a table made of packing crates, and some food on the table. The Frenchman stamped out his cigar half-smoked, and came toward me. My heart thumped with fright. I had no clock, had no idea how long Louie had been gone. Ten or fifteen minutes, I guessed—but how long would it take him to get to Belview and back with the Duke?

My guard-prisoner was impressed enough with my claims on the Duke that he only lifted the light from my fingers and held it to the wall himself. He then took it to the barrels in the corner and set it on the floor, took up a tin cup and pulled the cork from the bunghole of one of them. A stream of dark liquid poured out and he drank it down as though it were water.

I was terrified he would get drunk and attack me. *"Ne buvez pas,"* I commanded in a stern voice. He looked at me, smiled boldly, and took another drink. How long it was taking them. Why didn't they come?

At last it happened. He set down his cup and advanced toward me. There was no hesitation this time. He put both his arms around my waist and pulled me close to him. I pushed at his chest and kicked his shins with my soft, harmless slippers. He was no taller than I was. Our eyes and lips were exactly level; yet he had, even in his drunken condition, three times my strength.

"Le Duc vous tuera! Il est mon ami!" I reminded him with panting gasps. He fixed one hand behind my head and pulled it rudely toward his brandy-soaked lips.

My French deserted me. "Don't! Don't touch me! I'm the Duke's friend. He'll—"

"Kill you!" Clavering said, in quite a polite tone, and suddenly my attacker was being lifted six inches off the floor and flung aside as though he were an empty coat.

In my struggle with the Frenchman I had not heard their approach, but how glad I was to see them. Smugglers, criminals—whatever they were, they were welcome. I threw myself gratefully and shamelessly into Clavering's arms and heaved a sob of relief. He held me closely for a moment and said nothing, but I could hear his heart pound. His coat was wet and cool—it was still raining, then—and felt rough against my cheek. His hands moved up and down on my back comfortingly.

"You shouldn't have left her alone with that maniac," he said to Louie over my shoulder, then bent his head down to mine. "It's all right, Prissie. Come now, don't cry. I'll take you home."

Home, though it was only yards away, had such a reassuring sound to it. "Yes, take me home," I said, and pulled away from his arms. There was a little delay while Louie lit their own candles from mine, then Clavering took up the candelabrum and followed me to the door, slid the bolt, and we walked up the narrow stairs into the parson's bench—climbed over its side and stood in the dimly lit salon.

"Close the lid," I said, as I didn't want even that reminder of what I had been through.

"Sit down. I'll get you some wine," he said. I sank benumbed onto a sofa.

He handed me a glass and sat down beside me. Apparently under the misapprehension that I still required comfort, he put an arm around my shoulders. "He didn't do any worse than try to kiss you?" he asked.

"No, but he would have," I replied, removing his arm.

"Louie's a fool. Well-meaning, but to leave you alone . . . Drink your wine. It will calm you."

"I don't want to be calm. I want an explanation."

"All in good time," he answered calmly. "Isn't it strange to be here alone in the middle of the night? Very intimate, don't you think?"

"Clavering . . . "

"Don't you think you should call your friend Burne?" he suggested, turning to smile lazily at me.

"You are not my friend."

"Except when you are in trouble. I heard you use me to threaten André."

"If it weren't for you I wouldn't have been in trouble. How *dare* you use my house for smuggling?"

"Not your house, Prissie. *My* land—that is temporarily leased to you. Unfortunately it abuts against the wall of your house, but really, I offered a dozen times to buy it from you and save you this unpleasant episode. I had the sinking feeling that sooner or later you'd get into the parson's bench. The door at the bottom of the stairs was always kept bolted, by the way. I guess André must have heard you trying to break it down, and decided to let you in."

"How could you expect me *not* to discover it, when you were laughing and carousing down there to wake the dead?"

"I thought you'd be safely asleep in your bed by that time. I tried to keep the noise down to a roar, but after a successful trip the boys always have a round. What were you doing up and all alone at such an hour?"

"It's *my* house! I don't have to explain to you why I am up."

"You don't have to explain why you decided to go investigating all alone in your chemise, either, but it does seem unlike the practical Miss Denver. Quite like the impractical one who tries to ride a nag she can't handle, though, now that I come to think of it."

"Don't try to shift the blame for this night's work onto *me*. You have a great deal of explaining to do."

"I have, and I shall do it tomorrow. You're too upset now. In your excitement the impropriety of our situation has slipped your mind. I have no objection in the least to your entertaining me in such charming *déshabille*, but Slack might misunderstand."

"I am not entertaining you."

"You noticed that too, did you? I am happy to see we agree on what constitutes entertainment. I think that as we have allowed all the other proprieties to go by the boards, we might as well dabble in a little entertainment. Why should André be the only one to enjoy the night's work? And you *did* tell him you are my friend, you know. I believe I even heard the word *tuera* being mentioned. Now I don't go *killing* every fellow who makes advances to a lady unless she is *my* lady."

"Don't you dare lay a hand on me!" I said in a low voice.

"I never can resist a dare," he answered, and laid not one hand but two on my shoulders, pulling me roughly into his arms. He soon placed his lips on mine as well and was kissing me soundly. Had I not already suffered so many unusual adventures that night, I might have been more outraged, but somehow it seemed a suitable climax to the evening. It seemed to soothe my jangled nerves. I did not bother to fight him off and give him the idea it mattered; it would have pleased him too well. I let him embrace me—and enjoyed it, but did not actively participate. I underwent the thing as though it were an experiment, trying to analyze the sensation of being held and mauled a little by a man.

"You can do better than that, Priss," he said teasingly. "Another first, I trust?"

"Yes, unless you include your French smuggler friend."

"That explains it. Practice makes perfect. Don't be afraid."

"I don't need any lessons."

"Yes, you do. It is like riding, and *can* be taught. Relax and enjoy it." He kissed me again, more strenuously, but I don't think he followed his own advice. He was not the least relaxed; in fact, he became so ardent that I was obliged to struggle free.

"Oh you're learning rapidly," he said with approval. "A natural. You'll be giving me lessons before the week's out." He put his hand on the back of my head, just like the Frenchman, but I pulled it away, suddenly a little frightened of my own feelings.

"You have the most sensuous lips I've

ever kissed," he said, leaning toward me with his hands extended.

This was not to be trusted, nor endured. "Burne!"

"I am aflame, my love. I have been for ages. You can even shout a 'Wed' at me and I won't take it amiss. Someone is singing it in my ears already."

"That would be your conscience—if you have one! I think you had better go now," I said, pulling my dressing gown tightly about me. Not to say that it was open; it wasn't, but the belt was working loose.

"All right, Priss, I'm going." He arose.

"I hope there is some way you can keep that French maniac out of my house."

"I trust Louie has taken care of him by now, and if he hasn't, you may be sure I will. What would you like me to do with him? Put him on the rack? Pull out his fingernails? Cut out his tongue? Remember the temptation the poor fellow was subjected to. And he *is* French, you know." He walked to the parson's bench and lifted the lid.

"Well, *au revoir*. Time to crawl into the bench. I shall be back early in the morning to explain everything."

I don't remember what I said. I do recall he stood on the first rung of the stairway leading below, and very nearly tumbled over, cracking his shins when he reached out toward me and I stepped back suddenly. I also remember he uttered some ungentlemanly oaths, but apologized.

"Shall I tell Slack?" I asked. I must have been still in shock to ask such a question—to ask permission to do it, I mean.

"Suit yourself," he answered curtly. "It is clear you have no intention of further humoring *me*. Goodnight, Miss Priss."

That night I lay awake for hours, thinking. How had I been deranged enough to have let him go without getting a full explanation? In fact, he had very likely kissed me to make me forget it, and had succeeded. But the morning was coming, and I would have my revenge. He would explain his web of lies over the past weeks. How did he come to be embroiled in these low pursuits? Was it a love of excitement and danger? If so, why not involve himself in the war with Napoleon? Plenty of chance there for any reckless, danger-loving man to combine duty and pleasure.

I saw the sun rise through my window, a beautiful golden-rose glow that promised another fine day. As it crept above the treetops, I began to consider arising, then my eyes closed at last and I slept until noon. I was furious when I awoke and glanced at the clock. Why had no one awakened me? Before many moments I was up, dressed, and hurtling down the stairs. I ran into the morning parlor, to be confronted with the spectacle of Miss Slack hovering over Clavering's shoulder, pouring him a cup of coffee, and smiling gaily.

"Well, young lady," she said, "I think you might have included *me* in your little adventure last night."

"You told her?" I asked Burne.

"You know these women. They always worm all your secrets out of you."

"Then she has done a good deal better than I have, for it seems to me I managed to let you off without an explanation, and I am eager to hear it now."

"I am eager to give it. Do sit down and have a cup of coffee, Priss." *My* home and *my* coffee.

"This is the last cup. I'll pour it and get some more," Slack said and left us.

"I must say, you don't look any the worse after last night's frolic," he said, with his eyes lingering on my face.

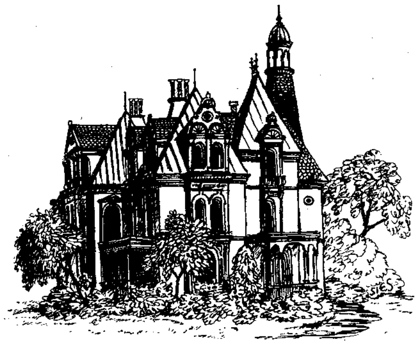
"Never mind trying to trick me out of an explanation with that old stunt. I mean to hear why you have taken to smuggling with your cousin, Louie FitzHugh.

"It gets dull, you know, sitting in the House in London, listening to long-winded speeches, then coming home and talking to tenant farmers and bailiffs. Everyone needs a little excitement in his life."

"Clavering, do you mean to sit there and tell me unashamedly that you are a *smuggler*!" I demanded in astonishment, for I was sure he would try to put some good face on it.

"I am a little ashamed," he confessed. "But there's no real harm in it. It keeps Louie and the boys out of worse mischief."

"If you were ever found out, you would be disgraced."



"It would be embarrassing, and that is why I have come to ask if you could find it in your heart to overlook the events of last night."

"You're asking me to conspire in crime?"

"Not actually take an active part. Just keep a look out, my darling."

"*What* are you talking about?"

"I organize the runs," Clavering said blandly, "But we use Lou's ship, the *Nancy Jane*, and he is the better sailor, so he is the captain of the ship. Nominally he is in command at sea, I suppose. A difference has not arisen on the high seas to put it to the test."

"You mean you actually go to France with them?" The more he talked, the less could I believe that he was telling the truth.

"That's the best part. The rest of it is *work*."

"And that's where you've been these past days, when you pretended to be in London, at Parliament?"

"Yes, we got back last evening, in the teeth of a booming gale, but Cousin Louie is up to anything. I have my own patrol out, so Smith doesn't bother with it. He feels they wouldn't dare land here, and my posted mantraps keep the lands free of trespassers who are likely to disturb us in transit from sea to chapel, so we have pretty clear running. I don't think there is much risk of being discovered. Really, I think I have devised an admirable arrangement."

"I doubt Leo Milkin, the cripple at the inn, would agree with you."

"There is not a mantrap of any kind on any of my land."

"How did he come to be crippled, then?"

"He fell into the excavation at the ruined chapel one night while drunk, and broke or sprained his ankle. As I had posted my signs the day before, it was generally assumed he was my first victim, and as it proved so efficacious in keeping others away, I did nothing to allay the rumor. In fact, he was paid handsomely to drag his limb around town and tell everyone he met what had happened to him, as a warning."

"You actually *paid* the man to blacken your character?"

"No, just to lie a little."

"Yes, you're fond of that. The lies you've been telling me. You knew all the time why my grate was shaking, with your men rolling their brandy around and banging against the walls, and you let me go on worrying."

"It was accidental at first. I was away, first in London and later in France, when you came here, and by the time I got back you had already bought up Seaview. If only I had known your aunt wished to sell, what a lot of bother we would both have been saved. But you were in and complaining of the noisy chimney before I knew what was happening. It was accidental the first time, but when you spoke of ghosts and proved impervious to all my lies and bribery, we decided to see if we couldn't scare you out. I went down one night, and Louie the next morning, and gave the wall a couple of good boots. But you reciprocated by calling in Pickering to hint you toward the parson's bench, and then you began speaking of excavating—"

"And you knew all along that there was no fort underneath Seaview."

"I regretted I had chosen a *fort* when I remembered the remains of one at Pevensey, just three miles away. Once Slack took up an interest in the hobby, I was in constant dread she would tumble onto it."

"*I* was the one who tumbled to it. I knew it couldn't be another fort. What is it, by the way?"

"The remains of a villa. My great-grandfather was the one who made the discoveries and first became interested in all this digging business. When he built Seaview, he had dug out most of the land between the chapel and put in the underground tunnel at that time. It runs from the chapel to the foundation of your cellar—and up into your parson's bench, of course. I can't think why he did it, for there was an unusual period of peace prevailing at the time under Robert Walpole. But we had just made peace with France after the Spanish Succession Wars, and it may have been thought the peace would not be with us long. Nor was it, in historical time lengths. Or it might have been done to give easy but private access to the remains of the villa without laying them open to the elements. In any case, he had the tunnel built, and it is an excellent place to hide the goods."

"How did you come to use Frenchmen? I should think if you are going to break the law and smuggle, you might at least let the profits go to Englishmen."

A look of guilty surprise flew across his face, and I suddenly realized he was lying still. "Clavering! You haven't told me a word of truth. What *are* you up to?"

"Why would I tell you *lies* of a nature so unflattering to myself? Of course it is true. I use mostly Englishmen, but a few Frenchies help us."

"I know perfectly well you are lying. I don't know what you are really doing, but I know it's not this, or this is not all of it, at least."

"Well, what do you think I'm doing? Damn it, Prissie, I'm an *Englishman!*" he said angrily.

"If I thought for one minute you were helping Napoleon Bonaparte I'd report you so fast your head would spin."

"I would have a very poor opinion of you if you didn't."

"You *promise* me you're not?"

"How can you doubt it?" he demanded furiously. "That damned upstart has spilled the blood of thousands of Englishmen; my own cousins and friends slaughtered, to say nothing of the country virtually bankrupted. It is the duty of each of us to do what he can . . . " he pulled himself up to a stop. "Well, I may be a smuggler, but you may be sure I am not helping Napoleon Bonaparte in any way."

◆

DIANE

by Robert F. Whisler

Walt Disney didn't draw you kneeling
among mosaics of meadowy flowers
or dancing in the sun under birds
and butterflies fluttering by.
Disney didn't picture you following
a scented trail through a fantasy of trees
where fawns wobble up for you to pet.
But I did, dreaming you in moonlight
running barefoot along the shore
to fling your clothes into the surf and swim
out toward a barely whispered call,
or in a deeper forest under starlight,
leaping into my arms to roll with me
in honeysuckle, sweet, and bleeding hearts.

◆

"So that's it," I said, and put down my coffee cup. I smiled at him. "You might have told me, Burne."

"Priss, what do you . . . "

"I won't ask embarrassing questions. I know you spies have to work in secrecy."

"What foolish notion have you taken into your head now?"

"I have taken the notion, not completely foolish, I think, that you are sneaking into France as a smuggler to find out exactly what is going on there. There is news to be picked up on the coast of France, I imagine."

"The coast? Lord no, you have to go farther inland than that," he answered, abandoning his idea of keeping me in ignorance.

"Oh Burne, I hope you are careful."

"I am very careful, since I have so much to come home to. Louie tells me I'm turning chicken-livered, only because I refused to help him kidnap a French colonel we saw straggling along the streets of Amiens. But as we would have had to drag him sixty or seventy miles to our ship, I felt it better to soak his insides with brandy and strain out information from him there."

"Is that the sort of thing you do?"

"We indulge in various pastimes. Loiter around the less genteel cafés and inns, and visit some known connections—paid informers. Not every Frenchman backs Napoleon."

"Will there be an attack, do you think?"

"He could hardly muster enough men to launch a smuggling boat at this time. With the Prussians in the north and Wellington coming up at him from the south, he hasn't time to think of it. Next time I'll try to make it all the way to Paris and—"

"Next time! You're not going again?"

"Just have my leash ready for me, Prissie. It won't be much longer. I have to do it, you know."

"Don't worry, I'm not planning to bridle you."

"Leash, love. I said leash. I trust you walk a dog with more skill than you ride a horse, or my life isn't worth a Birmingham farthing."

"I'm sure I don't follow the tenor of these assorted animal references. I recall your antipathy to marriage, and I assure you I don't want a pet duke in the kennels—or the stables, either."

"I had some hopes I would be permitted right into the salon if I behaved myself. And after all, it *is* my house."

"Oh, it is Belview we are discussing. As you make yourself so free of Willow Hall, I thought it was here you were talking about. You must be lonely, of course, at home, with all those empty bedrooms—*rooms*—but—"

"You were right the first time. It is the bedrooms I find especially lonesome. As to my former views on marriage . . . "

"Not two weeks ago you were talking it down, saying you would rather jump from a housetop."

"The battle was already lost. It was the death rattle of a trapped man. After seeing you exactly four times—and being subjected to abuse at every encounter—and forcing myself to stay away for a week when I saw what peril I was running into, I gave it up. With your aunt pushing George at your head, I realized I'd have to marry you myself. You have no resistance to a bad bargain, and I was afraid you'd settle for him."

"I know perfectly well you only want

to get hold of Seaview, so don't bother trying to gull me."

"Oh, no, Priss. I think you know perfectly well it's *you* I want to get my hands on."

"You keep your great paws to yourself! Just because I let you . . . because you took advantage . . . " I came to a stuttering stop, not quite liking to say he had forced me.

He looked at his well-shaped hands and glanced up questioningly. "Paws, eh? Was I that rough with you? My hands have always been considered my one attractive feature. You hit me in a tender spot."

"We scarcely know each other at all, and it is absurd to speak of marriage, if that is what we *are* speaking of."

"Is that why you quibble? Certainly I mean to do the thing up right and legally. There are enough Louie's floating around the parish without adding another generation of them."

"Come, put down that cup before Slack gets back. Let us have a look at the parson's bench and see what should be done with it. We must nail the lid down at least."

We went into the salon, and he closed the door behind him. Without a single glance at the parson's bench, we sat on the sofa, the same we had occupied the night before.

He continued, "I know you are stubborn, foolish, headstrong, and a termagant. You must know by now that this gypsy exterior of mine hides the character of a criminal, complete with a strong tendency to lie, manipulate people, dominate, and take unfair advantage. My family associations are nearly as bad as your own. Now, where, outside of heaven, would you find a better-suited pair?"

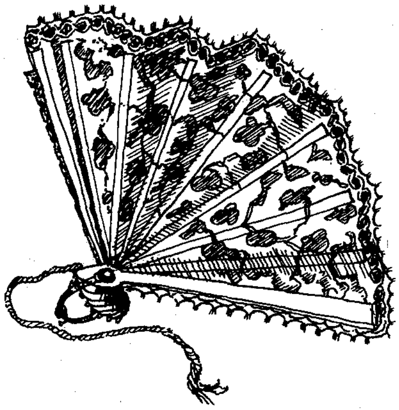
"At least you're not sensible!" I said, trying to register disapproval, but not quite succeeding.

"No, no, you will find very little in the way of common sense. Well, what do you say, Priss? Do you think you can handle me?" He worded his offer in terms impossible to reject, and his sly smile told me he knew it.

"I could handle you or a dozen like you!"

"That's what I thought, but I hope you will limit yourself to one," he replied and snatched me into his arms. Not content to seal the engagement with the customary kiss, he went on to point out he would have to leave soon for London to report his findings, and therefore had three days' lovemaking coming to him, all of which he wished to make up in five minutes' concentrated assault. I am afraid I was obliged to bolt to the fireplace and pick up a poker in my own defence, not that I would really have cleaved his head open, but it served to control him.

"Now that I am your lord and master—practically," he told me, regarding the poker a little fearfully, "I have a few commands to present to you. One, you will not send a groom to my stables to retrieve Juliette and attempt to ride her during my absence. I'll find you something you can handle at Tatt's while I'm in the city. Two, you will stay out of the parson's bench. Three, you will stay out of the meadow. Four, you will have your wedding gown made up while I'm gone. I smuggled you a lovely piece of white silk and will bring it over before I leave. I think I felt a waist on you last night, and would like to see it. If you could bring yourself to reveal a shoulder blade or wrist, I wouldn't mind, either."



"Thank you very much!"

He tossed up his hands and continued with his commands, every one of which I would certainly disobey. "Five, you will consult with Slack or your aunt or whoever you think can advise you on the proper method of throwing on a wedding with the utmost dispatch, without too much aroma of unseemly necessity to it."

"Burne—it takes weeks! There are banns and invitations and . . . "

"Nonsense! What do a pair of misogamists like us want with a formal do? Or do you harbor under that stony exterior some romantic notions of orange blossoms and white lace?"

"Heavens, no! I'm in mourning, really, for my stepfather, who isn't dead a year yet, but no one here knows it."

"Good. Would you mind putting down the poker?" he asked, with a look in his eye I had already come to mistrust sadly.

As there was the sound of voices outside the door—I put it down. Slack entered carrying a fresh cup of coffee for me, and with an inquisitive look on her face.

"Slack," Clavering said, "I am about to commit marriage with your girl, and I suppose I must explain a few things." He went on to tell her as much as I knew myself.

"I suspected something of the sort," she said calmly. "Well, it seems we have not given much talk to this wedding of yours. I want to express my congratulations to you both, and I hope you will be very happy. Have you thought where you will go for a wedding journey?"

"Burne is going to Paris with Louie for his wedding journey, and I am staying here with you," I told her.

"A little later we'll all go somewhere together," Clavering promised.

"All?" Slack asked with a laugh. "I hope I am not such a gudgeon that I plan to trail after you on your wedding journey."

"My dear, if *you* are not part of the dowry, I must beg off," he told her. "Who will help me discover the glories of our buried villa after the war is over? There is our museum—so much to be done there. I really *do* plan to set one up, you know, and you can imagine what little help this addlepated bride of mine will be. She wouldn't know a mosaic from a mural. Besides, I plan to keep her chained to her household duties—and the nursery. Tell her, Prissie."

"Slack, you can't abandon me to this monster! If I have to choose between the two of you, I choose *you*!"

Slack laughed merrily. "I begin to think the pair of you need a nanny," she said.

"We do!" Burne assured her. "And look how convenient my library will be for you."

"I'll think about it," Slack condescended, but there was not a vestige of a doubt in any of our minds. The thing was settled.

"Well, I'm off," Burne said. "I'll be back in three days. I'll see my chaplain before I go. If you want to start removing your things to Belview while I'm gone, just send a note over. I'll speak to my people to help you. Now, have we forgotten anything? You'll see to the nailing down of the bench, Slack? And if you hear any merriment below, remember how the smuggling community is to be dealt with. Sit on the bench, my darlings!"

He blew us a kiss and left.

EPILOGUE

October 31, 1813

Napoleon was defeated at Leipzig on October 19 and has retired into Paris. With the armies of the present coalition hounding him, it is unnecessary for Burne to continue his little trips. Indeed he says even Cousin Louie no longer goes, but I notice Officer Smith continues to keep a close eye on *Nancy Jane*, and our own patrols continue to roam the coast, flashing a signal from the best spot for landing. Nor do I perceive any shortage of brandy in Burne's decanter.

He speaks of setting up his museum, and speaks, too, of taking us through the tunnel to view the ruins, but has not done either.

Our journey to Bath draws close. We have already had one short one to London, just the two of us. If the trip to Bath is anything like it, it will be horrid. We didn't see a thing of London. We tramped through basements of shops and even private dwellings to see walls and pavements and also drove to out-of-the-way spots high up on hills to admire the old city walls. I am instituting a campaign to return in the spring to attend some concerts and plays and balls. A reference to Lady Inglewood and George I find useful in this scheme. I have only to hint she would be happy to accompany her "dear niece, the Duchess" as she calls me now, if my husband is too engaged, and Burne will suddenly find that he can manage "a week or two" for the enterprise. We will stay a month, however.

For our honeymoon to Bath, Slack is fashioning herself a bathing robe and expresses the intention of placing her feet where those thousands of Roman feet have trod at the diving stone. I trust she won't slip and fall in, for she can't swim a stroke.

Our wedding was carried out with the utmost secrecy, as though it were a crime. Only Lady Inglewood and George were there on my side, both with faces as long as though it were a funeral they were attending. The other smuggler in my husband's family, Lord Tremaine, and his wife came from Dover, but Louie was too lazy to come. He calls on us occasionally, and I like him excessively.

Under Louie's rough exterior there lurks the soul of a pet kitten. He is gentle and bashful. I mean to find him a bride and reform him. My own groom is sufficiently docile that I am ready to bear-lead his cousin, as well. I received from London a mount slightly less incorrigible than Juliette, but by no means tame. Lady Ing got Juliette back from Clavering by some unknown means, by which I mean an unknown price. She is looking very smug, and I think she got it without any expense at all. We have been nearly totally relieved of George's visits. He is dangling after some girl in the village who seems much inclined to encourage him. The girl is not so blue-blooded as Lady Ing could like, but the necessary tinge of gold is strong, and my aunt seems resigned to the match.

I have come to the end of my story. We have as yet contrived no incipient increase in the population, but it is early days yet for that. I am very busy being the mistress of a large home, head of half a dozen local charities, matchmaker and wife. It has been suggested to me by Clavering that I show a quite amazing disregard for my priorities. Wife should come first, or in any case not last. I soothe him by saying I leave the best for the last.

IN THE WIND

News about Books, Programs, Events

by Louise Apfelbaum

For lovers of romance with an affinity for period novels, Warner Books has two series of Regency romances; one by Caroline Courtney, their best-selling "Mistress of Romance," and another entitled **Your Warner Library of Regency Romance**, by such popular authors as Joan Aiken and Zabrina Faire. *(Warner Books, $1.75 each)*

A new line of romantic fiction has appeared on the stands. There will be six new **Silhouette Romances** every month, each with a contemporary setting in an exotic locale. These are fresh, wholesome love stories with happy endings, guaranteed to provide a few pleasant hours of escape. *(Silhouette Books, $1.50 each)*

Change of Heart by Sally Mandel *(Delacorte Press, $9.95)*, is an extremely moving novel about a young woman born with a serious heart defect. Sharlie unexpectedly falls in love with a handsome young man who saves her life. But love can be fatal for Sharlie, and she is faced with an agonizing decision: Should she renounce Brian, and never really live at all? Or should she risk everything for the chance of a normal life, and undergo an extremely dangerous operation that she knows she might not survive? In the tradition of **Love Story**, this bittersweet first novel by a talented young woman is filled with laughter and tears.

And the author of **Love Story** himself, Erich Segal, has published his third novel, **Man, Woman and Child**. It is about a man whose seemingly perfect marriage is suddenly threatened when he discovers that he is the father of a nine-year-old boy in France—and the boy's mother has just died. While this book is not exactly a romance, it should certainly satisfy Segal's many fans. *(Harper & Row, $9.95)*

For those of you who are addicted to **Dallas**, CBS-TV's prime-time soap opera, Dell is reissuing **Dallas** by Lee Raintree *(Dell Publishing Co., Inc., $2.25)*. The novel traces the Ewing family's history from even prior to the beginning of the original mini-series.

In September NBC-TV will broadcast **Shogun** as a maxi-series. Filmed on location in Japan, James Clavell's romantic novel will run September 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18. For the occasion Dell is reissuing the novel in paperback. *(Dell Publishing Co., Inc., $3.50)*

Have you ever wondered about the nature of love, or how many different kinds of love there are? A fascinating non-fiction study of romantic love is **Love and Limerance**, by Dorothy Tennov. *(Stein and Day, $11.95)* Dr. Tennov is a psychologist who has coined a new word to distinguish an ancient state: the extreme pain and joy of love-sickness. She discusses an underlying pattern that is recognizable in both men and women, and gives advice for coping with it when it becomes unduly painful.

when memory fades

(Continued from page 12)

when he appeared around the corner, and although she didn't mean to admit it, she wasn't really surprised to see him. She quickly gathered her things together and started for the door, pretending he wasn't there. He rapped on the glass but she didn't turn around, just shut the door behind her and locked it. Angie didn't want to encourage him. And besides, she knew it wouldn't be applause *this* time . . .

She was sitting in her usual place by the window at lunch when a voice behind her said, "May I join you?"

Mildly irritated—after all, there were lots of free tables—she looked up, then stared, not believing her eyes.

He looked different without his cap on, not funny any more, his hair a shock of tumbling blond curls. His beat-up old jacket was replaced by a rather smart sports coat. He followed her eyes. "Plainclothes security man Tom Barstow, that's me," he said with a cheery smile.

"H-how long have you worked here?" she asked, too surprised to be indifferent.

"Hmmm." He scratched his head thoughtfully. "All day."

A ghost of a smile barely lifted the corners of her mouth as she looked down at her plate.

"I saw the ad last week" he went on, unloading his lunch on to the table. "Just after you'd slammed the door of your display window shut on me—if you see what I mean. It seemed like a good idea. Security guards are in much greater demand than young, if brilliant, cellists." He paused, waiting for her to speak, but she said nothing and just went on eating. "It wasn't bad, you know," he said, watching her face, waiting again for a reaction.

"What wasn't?" she asked at last, her curiosity aroused.

"That window display with all the kids. Admittedly it wasn't as good as your last one, but you can't achieve that all the time, can you?"

She felt a slight blush of pleasure coloring her cheeks. "I didn't slam the door on you," she began, breaking off the lie in mid-phrase.

He let it pass. "How long have you lived in New York?"

"Almost a year."

"Oh, a newcomer." He smiled. "I'm an old inhabitant myself. Three years at Julliard and eighteen months among the ranks of the seldom-employed. As I said, they aren't exactly lining up for unknown cellists at the moment. Still, this job'll pay the rent, and if anything does come up—if the quartet gets a booking—I'm pretty much free."

Angie nodded. She didn't quite understand, but she was afraid to ask any questions, afraid of creating any kind of link with another human being.

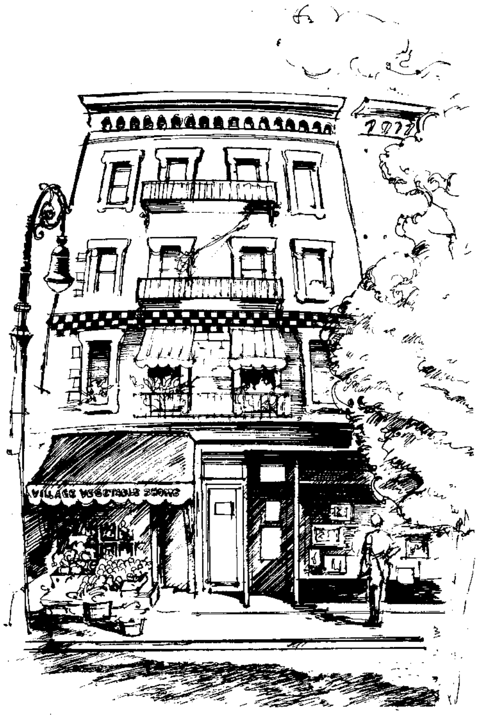
"What are you working on this afternoon?" he asked. "Creating another masterpiece?"

"You'll have to judge for yourself," she said, glad to be back on less personal ground. "I'm doing the corner window, the 59th Street side."

"I shall examine it tonight," he said in a crusty voice, "and give you my verdict tomorrow over lunch." They smiled at each other, and Angie was momentarily aware of feeling very happy.

By lunchtime the next day, Angie was disturbed to find how tense she was.

"Nice," he said, sitting down, "very nice indeed. But I think you ought to have dressed Fred there in a dirty old beige coat and a cloth cap."



She glanced up, startled, and found his eyes waiting for her.

"Aha!" he said, pointing a finger at her, "so you did think of it!"

"No!" she protested, blushing furiously.

"Come on," he teased, "confess, you did think about it."

She shook her head, inexplicably close to tears. She felt threatened. Why couldn't he leave her alone?

"Hey," he said, his voice quite different now, soft and concerned, "I was only kidding, honestly."

"It's all right," she shrugged, strengthening her defenses again.

"Listen, would you care for something to eat tonight after work? Chinese maybe, or Italian?"

"Thank you, but I'm already doing something." It sounded much too pat, an obvious lie. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I must be getting back . . ."

That night she felt more wretched than she'd felt since the day she had gotten her mother's letter with the newspaper clipping about Mike's wedding. Until now, she'd managed to keep herself anesthetized against feeling, but suddenly it had worn off, and misery and loneliness engulfed her like a wave. Slowly, meticulously, she went through the contents of the drawer, reading the letters, although she knew them all by heart. For the first time they had a hollow ring for her, showing just how empty, how barren her life now was. She lay for hours, refusing to admit that the wetness on her cheeks was tears.

On Friday, Angie went up to the cafeteria as usual, and sat where she always sat, waiting. She sensed him behind her before he spoke and she half-turned, expecting to see him sit down as usual.

"May I join you?" he asked, his eyes for once not laughing. "I won't if you don't want me to."

He was definitely forcing her into a corner again and she resented it. Why couldn't he just sit down without demanding that she make the decision? She gestured at the empty chair beside her.

"Sorry." He leaned forward. "I didn't quite catch that. Did you say yes?"

"Yes," she said, staring stonily in front of her.

They sat in uneasy silence.

"Oh, incidentally," he said, "I wonder if you'd like coming to a recital tomorrow night. Nothing very grand, but you might enjoy it."

"No thanks," she said automatically. "I'm . . ."

". . . already doing something," he finished for her. "Pity, I could have used some moral support."

"You're playing?" she asked. He nodded. She would have liked to hear him play, but she couldn't change her mind now—it might give him the wrong idea.

"Well, keep your fingers crossed for me," he smiled briefly. "There's a chance that one of the big concert agents might be there, and he may just have the perception to spot my budding genius."

"Of course," she said, keeping her eyes averted. "I hope it goes well."

She had just put the kettle on for some Sunday afternoon coffee when the doorbell rang. Its low, urgent buzz made her jump. Only the milkman and the landlord rang her bell, and never on a Sunday afternoon.

"Coming," Angie called as she went to open the door.

Tom was leaning against the door frame, his arms folded. "Hello," he said. "I was just passing by, so I thought I'd pop in," he said, neatly sidestepping her question. "Aren't you going to ask me in?"

Her first instinct was to say no, but she couldn't. "Yes, of course," she said hesitantly. Panic began to well up inside her. No one had ever been in her room before. It was the one totally private, safe part of her life, and no one else had any part of it.

"I've just put the kettle on," she chattered a bit nervously. "Would you like coffee?"

"Thanks." He sat down in the big green armchair and gazed round the room. "Aaah!" he said, his eyes lighting on the poster, "the trendy man's lawn flamingo!"

"What do you mean?" Angie challenged, at once on the defensive.

"That old Lautrec poster," he nodded toward it, "it's as much of a cliché as any Edgar Guest poem!"

"I like it," she said, her voice tight, "for personal reasons." The phrase sounded unnatural coming from her.

"Treading on sore toes, am I?" he probed, watching her face.

"I'd rather not discuss it."

"Why not?" Tom persisted. "Obviously it can't be that painful to you or you wouldn't surround yourself with things that remind you of it."

Again she felt under attack.

Her resentment quickly turned to anger. "Not that it's any business of yours," she said, "but it was a present from the boy I was engaged to. There. Does that satisfy you?"

"What happened?" Tom's tone was calm and gentle.

She glared at him for a long moment, hating him for his persistence, and then the anger left her. "He married someone else, that's all," she said wearily.

"So you came down to New York with your memories and your poster and turned your bedroom into a shrine to lost love! Ah, isn't that sweet?"

"You don't understand," she said, angry with him and with herself for giving so much away.

"Oh yes I do, only too well. You aren't the first person in the world who's been hurt, you know, and you certainly won't be the last. Life's still going on out there. All right, so you've shut yourself away from it and now you don't get hurt—but you don't get anything else either. You're only about thirty percent alive. Remember the Streisand song, 'People Who Need People' and all that?"

Angie didn't answer. She just stood there pulling at a fingernail.

"Lecture over." Tom got to his feet. "This wasn't really what I came to see you for. I only came to say goodbye."

Her head jerked up, her eyes wide as a startled deer's. "G-goodbye?"

"That agent I told you about, he was there last night and he's fixed me up with two weeks in the Boston Symphony as replacement second cello. I'm off on the six o'clock train."

"Oh," she said flatly. "What about the shop? Will you come back after . . ."

He shook his head. "They wouldn't have me. I'm leaving pretty suddenly as far as they're concerned."

So she wouldn't ever see him again. Was that what he was trying to say? She wanted to ask him, but couldn't bring herself to do so.

It was as if he'd read her mind. "It's up to you now. If you ever decide to come back and join the living, just let me know." He walked to the door. "Take care, eh?"

Angie sat unmoving after he'd gone, unable to make any kind of sense out of the jumble of thoughts inside her head. How dare he barge into her life like that, tell her she ought to live, ought to feel, trample on the things she cared about most? She already knew she would miss him, his company, his criticism on her work, his stream of daft, funny chatter. Why couldn't he have left it as it was, why did he want to turn it into something it wasn't . . . could never be?

During that first week she found herself thinking about him at odd times in the day, wondering how he was getting on, whether he really meant it when he said goodbye.

"Just let me know," he had said, "if you ever decide to join the living again." But how could she let him know—even if she wanted to, which she didn't—when she had no idea where he lived or anything?

On Sunday morning, the second Sunday he had been away, Angie took the poster down. Suddenly she saw it as it really was: a rather bad reproduction, its edges curling, its colors fading. Tom had been right. She held it out at arm's length and was just about to rip it in two when the idea came to her.

By ten o'clock Monday morning Angie had almost finished the window. She papered the flats at the back to look like a brick wall and borrowed a wrought-iron table and chairs from Garden Furniture. The dummies in a new line of Paris copies, were sitting around drinking champagne. Angie took a deep breath and with trembling fingers pulled the poster from its cardboard tube. Carefully she spread glue over the back of it and stuck it crookedly to the wall. What if he didn't come by? What if he didn't see it? He had to...

Slowly, deliberately, she picked up a whitewash brush and slapped a dirty grey wash all over it. The sense of relief went to her head like champagne on an empty stomach. She grabbed hold of one corner and ripped it. "Divan Japo" it said now, as a corner flopped down and hung limply. She wanted to laugh and cry and scream and jump up and down—she'd done it and nothing had happened, no bolts from the blue. She felt nothing except an overwhelming desire to have Tom see it.

What if he didn't see it, she kept thinking? What if he did, and it didn't make any difference? At exactly half-past five, she left the shop.

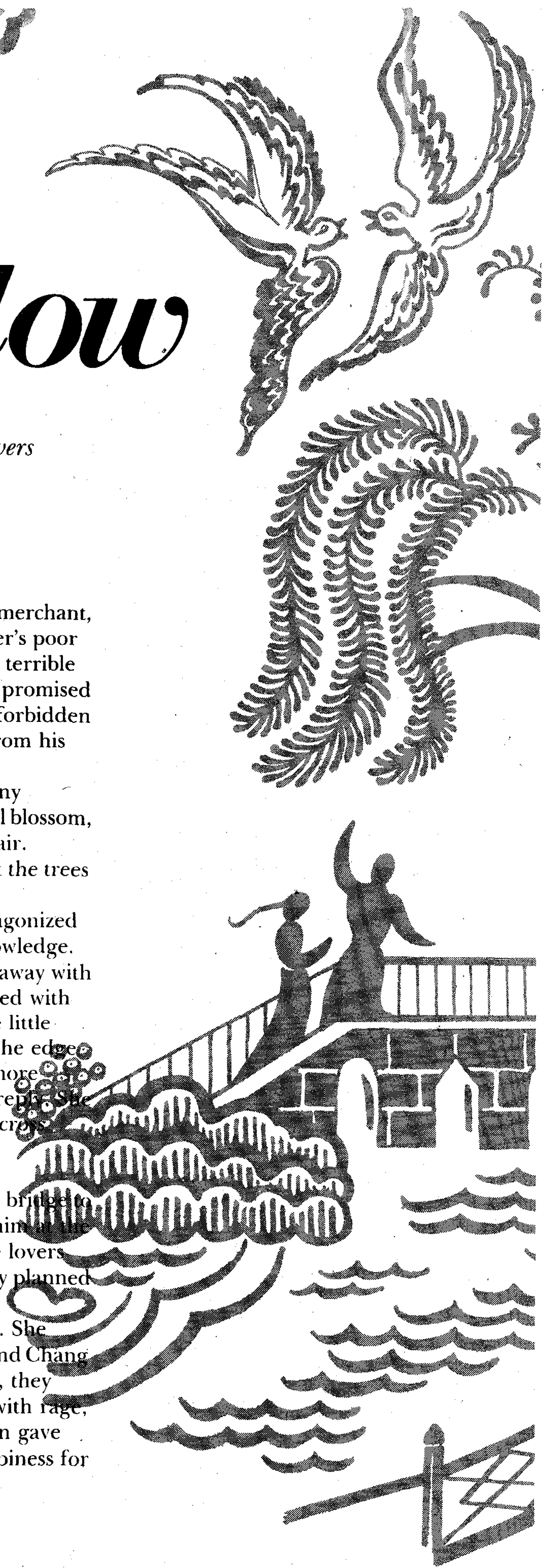
As she turned the corner on to Lexington Avenue she saw him standing there in front of her window. Her heart turned a cartwheel. For a moment she just stood there, all life gone from her body. Then slowly she forced herself to walk toward him. He didn't turn around, didn't seem to see her. She stopped a foot away from him and waited.

"It's the best thing you've ever done," he said simply, and his hand closed firmly over hers.

A Cameo Legend

Blue Willow

Beneath the willow's sweeping boughs, the lovers met in secret ecstasy



Kueng-shi, the beautiful daughter of an avaricious merchant, had the misfortune to fall in love with her father's poor secretary, Chang. Kueng-shi's father flew into a terrible rage when he heard about the young lovers, for he had promised his daughter's hand to a very rich man. Kueng-shi was forbidden to ever see Chang again and her father banished her from his home to the cottage that lay at the edge of his garden.

The little cottage was one fit for lovers' dreams. Its tiny garden held a drooping willow tree and a fruit tree in full blossom, but poor Kueng-shi, longing for her lover, was in despair. All day long she would sit by her window and gaze out at the trees as the wind rustled their leaves.

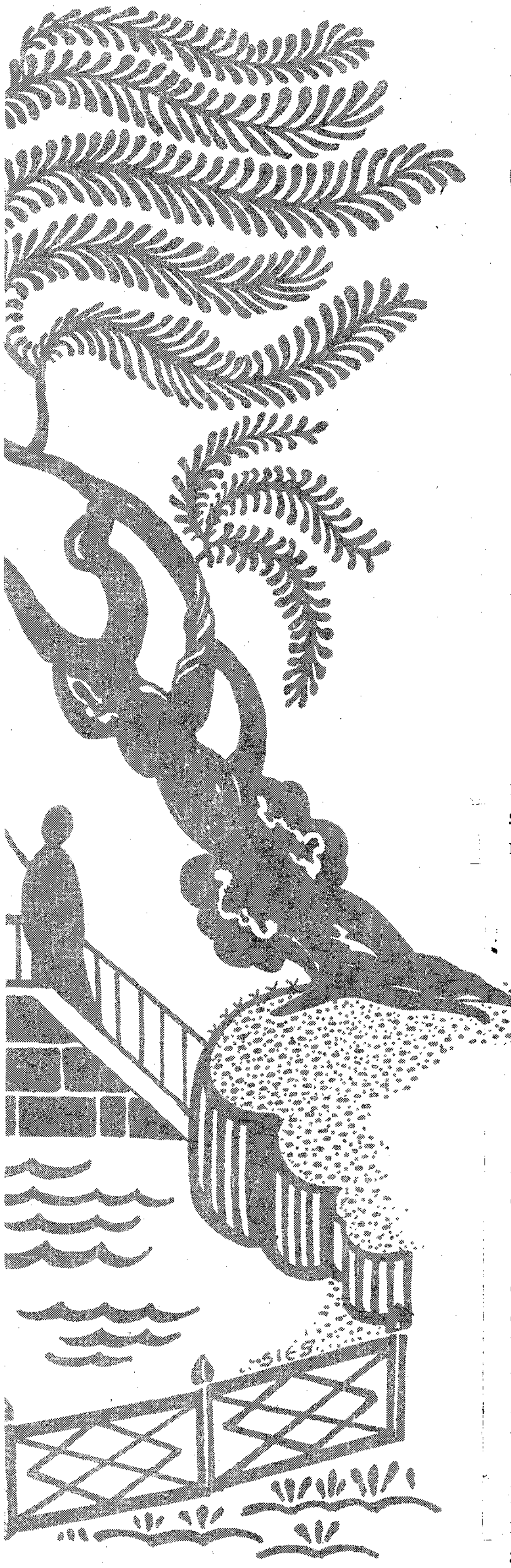
Across the river, Chang, too, pined for his love and agonized about getting a message to her without her father's knowledge. Finally, he found a way: he would ask Kueng-shi to fly away with him and he would put his letter into a coconut shell fixed with a sail to float across the lake. Kueng-shi spied the brave little boat with its secret cargo from her window and ran to the edge of the water to retrieve it. Joy entered her heart once more as she read Chang's message and swiftly she penned a reply. She put her missive in the coconut boat and sent it sailing across the river once more.

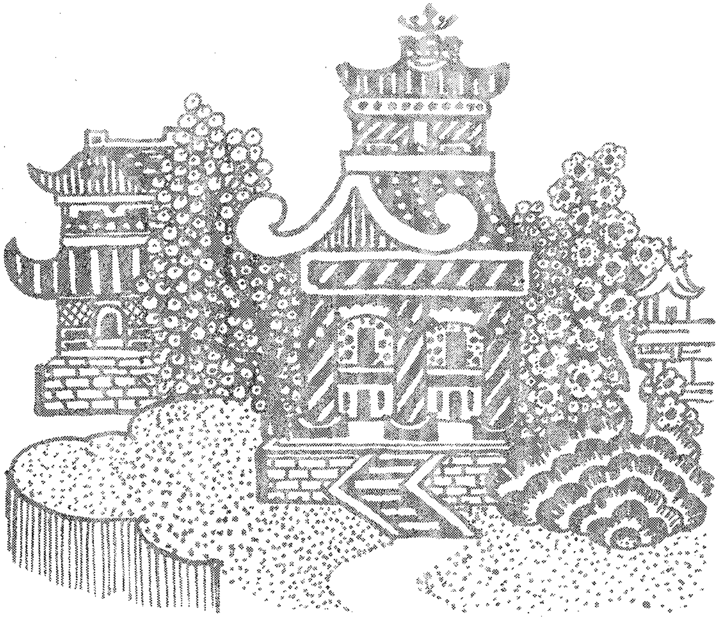
She did not have long to wait.

With the courage born of hope, Chang stole across the bridge to Kueng-shi's cottage. He found his beloved waiting for him at the edge of the garden, close to the foot of the bridge. The lovers embraced and vowed they would never part. Hastily, they planned their escape.

Kueng-shi was the first to attempt to cross the bridge. She carried her jewelry box, her dowry for her bridegroom, and Chang followed closely behind her. Halfway across the bridge, they heard a terrible furor. It was Kueng-shi's father. Wild with rage, he ran after the couple, brandishing a whip. But passion gave the lovers wings and they escaped to live in utmost happiness for a little while in a house across the lake.

By Alicia Martin





Neither Kueng-shi or Chang gave a thought to the wealthy man to whom Kueng-shi had been promised. His jealousy had been smoldering from the time he first learned that Kueng-shi was in love with another man. By the time the lovers escaped, the rich man's jealousy had turned to uncontrollable rage; he set fire to the little house and the two lovers inside died.

The Chinese artist paints the lovers forever crossing the bridge at the edge of the garden where the willow tree stands, the father chasing after them. Two white doves fly overhead, symbolizing the souls of the lovers, and the willow, representing longevity, symbolizes enduring love.

The Chinese Willow Pattern is one of the most famous china patterns in the world. Its introduction to the Western World dates from 1639 when the East India Trading Company brought examples of the exquisite motif out of China. Variations on the original Chinese motif led to the design for a pottery ware produced in England. The "Blue Willow Pattern" was commercially manufactured for the first time around 1780 by Thomas Turner at Coughly and by Lowestoft, both in Britain. Thomas Minton, founder of the famous chinaware firm in Stoke-On-Trent, England in 1793, created the same willow pattern for Spode china that is currently manufactured. Its own longevity is testament to its popularity; not only has this chinaware pattern been in existence for hundreds of years, but it has also graced the tables of many important and distinguished persons. President Martin Van Buren used the Blue Willow pattern during his term in the White House from 1837 to 1841. It is still manufactured by, among others, Royal China, Inc. of Seabring, Ohio, as well as several international chinaware firms.

Although there are variations on the delicate pattern, the Mandarin father, the willow tree, the two lovers and their transformation into two white doves are ever present. The white doves are the Chinese emblem of constancy—

"Beauty in life, unparted in death."

Illustrated by Leora M. Sies

THE ROYAL PAVILION

(Continued from page 19)

transpired between the prince and her mother, took her hand in hers. "Tell me what happened, Mama?" she whispered. "Who drove you away?"

"The first time?"

Mary nodded, afraid to speak.

"Charles Fox, the Whig Parliamentarian. He told the House of Commons that Prinny had given him, in writing, his avowal that he hadn't married me. And then there was Lady Jersey. A formidable lady, Mary, and an absolute social lioness. She fed Prinny's vanity by telling him his unpopularity was due to his associating with a Catholic. And . . . and she even went so far as to suggest to him that he marry a Protestant."

"No!" Mary gasped. "It can't be! You . . . you had the proof of your own marriage."

"Indeed I had, my little one. But I can assure you that I will never, ever stoop to use it against Prinny. Our marriage may be over, but I will never cease to love him." She hesitated and turned her head away. "Anyway, perhaps I'm being a little unfair to Lady Jersey, for Prinny's debts were, by now, staggering, and Parliament refused to pay them unless he agreed to making a dynastic marriage."

"And you accepted this?"

"I had no choice, Mary. I went abroad, leaving Prinny free to marry his first cousin, Caroline of Brunswick."

"And he let you go? Oh, Mama, I would never have believed that the prince could have behaved so callously," Mary said, her indignation mounting as she pondered her mother's plight. "Why. . . why the very next time I see him I shall tell him so."

"You will do no such thing," Mrs. Fitzherbert said severely. "You don't understand. The climate in England at that time was violently anti-Catholic; I did what I had to do to save Prinny. Anyway, we had been married ten years, and I had my memories to support me in my exile."

"Then why did you return four years later?"

"He needed me and threatened to make public our marriage and suffer all the disastrous consequences that were bound to follow. I couldn't let that happen for he now had an infant daughter by his bigamous marriage. I . . . I did what I thought was for the best at the time. And I shall never regret that decision, for the next few years were the happiest I ever experienced. The only interruptions to our happiness were Prinny's bitter regrets and self-accusations for his earlier conduct, but I always managed to chivvy him out of these depressions."

"I'm pleased to hear that he felt such remorse," Mary declared, "for I find your disclosures quite disconcerting. What happened to force you apart again, if your joy was so great?"

"There, there, Mary. You must not be bitter. I'm not, and I have greater cause." She stood up slowly and with one last look at the pavilion beckoned Mary to follow.

"It was my religion again, Mary," she said when they were safely tucked into their carriage. "When George III went mad two years ago, and Prinny became Regent, his subjects refused to accept me. When we parted he showed me his will, and in it he said, 'Although by the laws of this country Mrs. Fitzherbert could not avail herself publicly of my name, still such she is in the eyes of Heaven, was, is and ever will be in mine.' It was this knowledge that helped me take that final, irrevocable step to leave him, and even today I draw great comfort from it."

Mary wiped away the tears that had formed in her eyes and flung her arms about her mother's neck. "Mama, Mama," she cried, "was ever a woman so badly used. I love you. I shall always love you."

Mrs. Fitzherbert returned the embrace before finally ordering her coachman to drive them home. "Sweet child, you have been a constant source of delight to me all these years and have always succeeded in erasing my loneliness. From now on we must look to the present and future, and not think of the past."

As the coachman made the last turn into the London Road Mrs. Fitzherbert's and her daughter's last glimpses of the Royal Pavilion were blurred by unshed tears.

Editor's Note

The Prince of Wales and Mrs. Fitzherbert went through a secret marriage ceremony in late December, 1785. They then lived as man and wife for many years. She was accepted by society and some members of the royal family, but was never addressed as the Princess of Wales, only as Mrs. Fitzherbert.

Were they or were they not truly married?

If being married consists only of having had a religious ceremony, they were. But the marriage could not be considered legally binding because two acts of Parliament stood in the way. The Marriage Act said that any marriage contracted by a member of the royal family under the age of twenty-five, without the king's consent, was invalid. The Act of Settlement stated that if the heir apparent married a Roman Catholic he forfeited all right to the crown.

Therefore, one must assume that the prince knew that the ceremony was not valid when he asked Mrs. Fitzherbert to become his wife.

George IV died in 1830. Around his neck he was wearing the picture of Mrs. Fitzherbert that he had once ordered placed on his heart when he was buried. He had not communicated with her for the previous ten years. However, hours before his death he received a final letter from her that she had had to have smuggled into his quarters because the most dreadful of all his mistresses, Lady Conyngham, had refused her admittance. It read:

> *Sir, after many repeated struggles with myself the apprehension of appearing troublesome or intruding upon your Majesty, after so many years of continued silence, my anxiety respecting your Majesty has got the better of my scruples, and I trust your Majesty will believe me most sincere when I assure you how truly I have grieved to hear of your sufferings.*

A month after George IV died, and her marriage could no longer endanger the royal family, Mrs. Fitzherbert showed her marriage certificate to the new king, William IV.

Supposedly, he was moved to tears and expressed his surprise at the forbearance she had shown over the years of the treatment she had suffered. He immediately offered to make her a duchess. Her reply was no, she did not *wish for any rank; she had borne through life the name of Mrs. Fitzherbert, had never disgraced it, and did not wish to change it. However, William IV ordered her to wear his livery and authorized her to put on widow's weeds for his royal brother. Seven years later, in 1837, Mrs. Fitzherbert died.*

While Prinny's love for Mrs. Fitzherbert was without doubt enduring, he was nonetheless, all during his life—as Prince of Wales, then Prince Regent and even as George IV—notorious for his love affairs. The most notable were with:

Lady Jersey, the very same lady who had encouraged him to marry a Protestant, and after Prinny married Caroline of Brunswick he made Lady Jersey one of his wife's ladies-in-waiting;

Lady Hertford, Mary Seymour's aunt;

Lady Conyngham, who had a strong leaning to diamonds and money. It was said that during George IV's last illness she had carted away sufficient silver and gold plate to fill several wagons.

Prinny's gorgeous folly, the Royal Pavilion in Brighton, England, exists today as one of the most dazzling and exotically beautiful buildings in the British Isles. If you are going to Britain and have a chance to get to Brighton, it is open to the public from July 1 to September 30 and on occasional holidays at other times of the year. For further details including bookings and guide services, write to the British Tourist Authority, 680 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10020. Telephone 212-581-4708.

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Magic Might Happen

(Continued from page 23)

speechless by shyness.

I said, "Do you suppose he loves her?"

"How can one say? Love comes in so many different shapes and forms. Everybody needs something different."

I said, "I thought—"

"No," said my mother. "He's not the sort of person you need. You need someone who will put you first, who will take care of you. The person who comes first in the life of a man like John Stebbings is John Stebbings." And then she said, "You'll forget him in time, Victoria, believe me."

It was September. There was a crispness in the air, the beginnings of autumn, blackberries on the brambles, the first falling yellow leaves. My mother was due to go on her Scottish holiday.

"I won't go if you don't want me to," she told me, but I told her not to talk nonsense, that I was perfectly all right, and that I would look after my father. When the time came, my father drove her to the airport to catch the plane to Inverness.

Three days later, it happened. It was a Sunday. Rosa had gone off for the weekend, and I was in the kitchen, starting to cook Sunday dinner for my father and myself. When the telephone rang, I heard him answer the call from his study. I had no premonition, nothing. When he came into the kitchen, I was occupied at the stove. I said, "Do you want white sauce with your cauliflower?"

He did not reply. I turned to look at him and saw him standing in the doorway, his usually ruddy face drained of color. Fear dropped like a dead weight into the pit of my stomach. He said, "There's been an accident."

My mother had borrowed her sister's car to go to an early church service. On the way home, she was involved in a collision with a van which had skidded out of control. The driver of the van had suffered no more than a few bruises, but my mother had been taken to the hospital.

◆

The Promise

by Myra Anderson

I will heart-twine you with tendrils of tenderness
Wisps of light in gossamer rays
Strew your path with songs in profusion
Laughter and silence for all of your days

Roused from a dream in pleasured confusion
I dwelt upon you and some of your ways
Dreamt and awoke with the sweetness of cleaving
Peacefully, sweetly for all of your days

Wise is the saying of old, as they have it
The tune-caller always the piper pays
But who would deny such a proper arrangement
With music like you for all of her days?

How you were sent I have no means of knowing
(Sometimes the dance in the distance plays)
But now you are here we shall pledge our alliance
To blessedly gladden the rest of our days

I said, "But she's going to be all right . . ." Any alternative was unthinkable.

"Yes," said my father, tonelessly, "yes, of course."

Sunday dinner was forgotten. We could neither of us have eaten it anyway. I packed an overnight bag for my father while he phoned the airport.

As he got into the car, he said, "You'll be all right?"

"Of course, Rosa comes back this evening."

"I'll ring you as soon as I've seen her."

I had never felt so alone in my life. I could have gone to Roger's mother, and she would have welcomed me with open arms and been very kind. But I couldn't leave the house, the telephone. I turned off the stove and put the uneaten Sunday dinner in the refrigerator. I went into the garden and pulled up weeds.

Late that afternoon my father telephoned from the hospital. My mother was still unconscious.

The day had become a vacuum, a nightmare. It was nearly five o'clock, and I had not eaten since breakfast. I made myself a quick sandwich, drank a glass of milk. I went into the living room and turned on the television and then turned it off again. I caught sight of my reflection in the mirror, my face like a ghost, my eyes, by some trick of light, transformed into two holes in my face. I went upstairs, and without really knowing what I was doing, put on my bikini and went out into the damp gray afternoon, and down the garden toward the river.

The cold deep water received me without a murmur. Above me, the trees dripped and the sky was darkening and gray. There was no warmth, but there was some strange comfort in the flow of the river. I swam for quite a time, deliberately exhausting myself. Somewhere a blackbird sang. Somewhere, somebody called my name.

At first I thought I had imagined it. There was nobody on this still, sad Sunday afternoon who could possibly have called me. And then it came again, unmistakable, robust, a masculine yell of "Victoria!"

I thought it might be Roger, the last person on earth I wanted to see. By now I was back at the rock in the middle of our swimming pool. I curled my fingers into a handhold and lay against it, waiting and silent.

"Victoria!"

I saw him coming down the garden and it wasn't Roger—it was John Stebbings. I realized, in some surprise, that I had not thought of him all afternoon.

He had reached the edge of the water. "Victoria."

It wasn't a dream. He was there, only a few feet away, wearing jeans and a polo-necked sweater.

"I've been looking for you everywhere. Didn't you hear me call?"

I shook my head. My teeth were chattering.

He said, "Come out. Now."

I could feel my heart pumping. I remembered everything my mother had told me about him.

He said, "If you don't come out now, I'll come in and get you."

I knew that he would. I let go of the rock and swam across to where he waited for me. He came to help me, wrapping me instantly in my beach robe.

"You lunatic. What made you go for a swim on a day like this?" He picked up one of the dangling sleeves and dried my face with it, and made one or two dabs at my hair as though he were trying to dry a wet dog.

I said, through chattering teeth, "There wasn't anything else to do."

He hurried me back to the house, and sent me upstairs to have a hot bath. I lay in the steaming water as long as I dared, and then dressed in warm slacks and the thickest sweater I owned. While I did this, I could hear him moving about downstairs, and when I joined him I found the living room bright with firelight. He had found his way around the kitchen and made a pot of tea.

He asked, "Are you warm now?"

I nodded. He poured the tea and handed me a cup. "Get this inside you."

I took it, closing my fingers around it in warmth. I said, "I don't know what you're doing here."

He told me. It seemed that my father had had an appointment with him in the city the following morning. Somehow father had found the time to call John at his apartment to tell him that he would be unable to keep it. He had then told John the reason.

"I asked about you," said John, "and he told me you were on your own. So I came down to be with you."

I said, "Rosa's coming back tonight."

"Is your mother going to be all right?"

"We don't know. My father's going to call me when he knows more."

"Have you had anything to eat?"

"I had a sandwich." I looked at him again, trying to make myself believe that he was here, he was really here. He had come from London, on a Sunday, in order to be with me, at a time when I needed more than anything else in the world the company of another human being.

I said, "I didn't think I'd see you again."

"I didn't exactly expect it, either." His eyes, those dark, bold eyes, were suddenly tender. "Would it have been better if I hadn't come?"

The horror of the day had destroyed all my inhibitions. "It's just that I'm not very good at being hurt like that. It never happened to me before."

After a little, he said, "You may not believe this, but I didn't mean to hurt you. You're so young, and . . . innocent, I suppose. And it was a completely new experience for me, and you must believe I was just as shattered as you."

"You've got a girlfriend in London. My mother told me. After that, I understood."

"No, you didn't. It's finished."

"Why?"

"You. You being alone. Your father's phone call came just as we were going out. I said I couldn't go because I was coming here. She was livid. It's not the first time we've been angry with each other. And suddenly I found I was taking a long, cool look at myself. It seemed to me that perhaps for the first time for a long time, I was doing something that was completely right, and honest, and wasn't self-centered. I'm afraid that sounds self-righteous and sanctimonious."

"What did your friend do?"

"She had no trouble finding a substitute for me, and I came here."

"I've spoiled it all for you."

"You spoiled nothing. You opened my eyes."

"Just because you're sorry for me."

"There's more to it than that."

I had not drunk any of the tea he had made me. Now I laid down the cup, carefully, as though it were important not to spill a drop. I said, "I don't want to be hurt again."

"I won't hurt you, ever again."

The telephone rang. The ringing slashed across the silence of the house, loaded with foreboding.

We looked at each other. I said, "That'll be my father," but I couldn't move.

"Do you want me to answer it?"

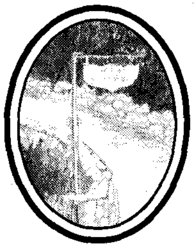
I nodded. He went into the study and I stayed by the fire, kneeling on the rug, and feeling the warmth of the flames on my face. I closed my eyes and prayed. I heard his voice through the door, low, firm, giving nothing away. After a minute he came back into the room. I still couldn't move. My mother was going to die.

He pulled me to my feet, saying, "It's all right. It's not as bad as they feared. She's conscious now, and she's going to be all right. Your father was slightly surprised when I answered the phone but I think quite relieved to know you weren't alone. He's asked me to stay till he gets back. He says Rosa can chaperone us . . ."

I had stopped listening. I was in his arms again, howling like a baby all over the front of his sweater. Partly because of my mother, partly because I had been so miserable, but mostly, although I had no idea of what was to become of us, because he had come back to me.

◆

the Top Field



(Continued from page 26)

on now a wig?"

"Certainly not," I said indignantly. "The red hair was for work. This is the real me."

He looked at me for a long time. "That makes two of us," he said. "It isn't often I can expose the real David Robb to anyone."

"Lorne Tracey," I said.

We shook hands solemnly. He went to the counter and returned with a tray of tea and Danish pastries. As I poured tea, he told me about himself. As he had said before, he'd been saving hard. He wanted to have his own vegetable market-garden and had taken a course in Holland, where they were expert in that line. He suddenly stopped.

"I ought not to bore you. You can't be interested in gardening."

"An uncle of mine has the disease badly, and I listen to *him*," I said. "He has just acquired a big field behind his shop in the country. By this time next year it will be full of unusual vegetables."

"Tell me more," said David Robb.

That was the beginning. If anyone had told me that a close friendship would grow out of a passing mention of the top field, I'm not sure I would have believed it.

We began seeing each other several times a week, depending on how our assignments went. David told me he had wanted to go and work for a local market gardener when he left school, but his parents were convinced that only the big concerns with the capability of freezing and canning made money these days. That argument didn't deter David. He wanted to grow things.

"There isn't a lot of money in it," he said, but you make a living, and you are doing what you want to do. I took all kinds of jobs and saved and saved. I met an old school friend who told me I ought to capitalize on my athletic build and looks, and try modeling. The fees are high." He looked a little sheepish. "I like sports, so I suppose the athletic bit is all right. I hadn't thought about my face."

'Oh, you're not bad looking," I assured him.

"I'm glad you think so," he said, his bantering tone accompanied by a look that made my stomach start to wobble. I thought it must be the pastry. I'd eaten rather fast.

"'I went to an agency that specializes in athletic types, and soon I was doing all right. But a few thousand isn't enough, not today. I'll have to start with something really small and grow slowly. I suppose your uncle wouldn't consider selling this top field you've been talking about?"

"You must be joking," I said. "He just bought it. He's been waiting years for the farmer to sell."

"All the same, I'd like to meet your uncle. I suppose you couldn't take me down next time you visit him?"

"I suppose I could," I said. "I'm going on Sunday. I'll phone."

Aunt Kate, of course, said I must bring him to lunch. We caught an early train. Uncle Jamie met us with the mini and David sat in front because of his long legs. They were soon acquainted: they spoke the same language. In the sitting room behind the shop, after the kind of country lunch Aunt Kate cooked to perfection, Uncle Jamie took David off to look at the top field. I helped Aunt Kate with the dishes and she told me the latest news from Australia. Betty's husband had bought a cottage near the farm he'd acquired and houses were being built there. The little settlement would soon be a village.

"Betty says the cottage has a neglected garden, one that would set her dad's hands itching for a spade."

Then she added, "I like that young man of yours."

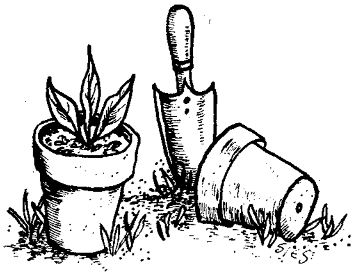
"He's not my young man, Aunt Kate."

"Boyfriend, then. He reminds me of Jamie when he was the same age."

"Did Uncle Jamie talk gardening all the time, even then?"

Aunt Kate nodded, smiling. "I knew what I was in for. But I was in love."

"How did you know? I mean, how did you know it was for real?"



"You know all right. Anyway, it's been real enough for me."

"Aunt Kate, did he take time off to propose to you? Romance, and all that? What about romance?" I asked.

"It was there. He took my hand as we walked along and said I was the only girl in the world for him, and if I didn't say yes he would be the saddest man in the world. If that isn't romance, I don't know what is. We went on walking and Jamie held my hand as if he'd never let it go."

"And he didn't mention gardening once?"

"Well," said Aunt Kate, "we were walking in Kew Gardens."

There was a glow in her middle-aged face that told me more than words. It was still there when Uncle Jamie and David came in for tea.

Everyday existence went on. I met David on the days he didn't have an assignment that clashed with mine. One morning I had a letter from Aunt Kate. I stared at it for a long time. I couldn't believe it. My aunt and uncle were leaving Oakapple to go to Australia.

Betty says to take only personal things. People are moving into the new houses. The garden is waiting for Dad. But the really exciting news is that she'll need a babysitter in a few months' time.

That last item helped the sad truth to sink in. Sad for me—I couldn't imagine life without Oakapple. Nothing else would have made them move except the prospect of a grandchild. The letter went on to say that they were putting their whole property into the hands of an estate agent. They didn't expect to have any difficulty in selling.

I was to meet David for supper that evening. I was at the restaurant early. So was David, obviously in very good spirits.

"I've had a great week," he said, as he settled himself. "Another hundred pounds in the kitty." He broke off. "Anything the matter, Lorne?"

I took Aunt Kate's letter from my bag and passed it over. He read it twice.

"Well, I guess that finishes me," he said at last. "There's nothing I'd like better than to buy the top field, but if he's selling the property in one piece I couldn't get anywhere near the price."

I couldn't bear the look on his face. I was miserable enough at the thought of Aunt Kate and Uncle Jamie going to the other side of the world, and David's bitter disappointment at the chance he was missing made it worse.

We would go down to Oakapple on Sunday to see if there was *any* chance of his getting it with a mortgage. I rang up Aunt Kate and she said of course we were both to come. Sunday. Uncle Jamie met us with the mini and was unusually silent during the drive to the village. Once inside the room behind the shop, I sat with Aunt Kate on the sofa reading Betty's letters, but with an ear stretched for what the two at the table were saying.

"I've saved nine thousand pounds," David said. "That would be enough and more to buy the top field. Would you separate it from the shop?"

"That depends," said Uncle Jamie cautiously, "on who wants to buy it and why."

"I do. It's the chance of a lifetime for me. I want to try a lot of new ideas. Experiment."

"Experiments are difficult to sell," warned Uncle Jamie. "I could have done it because we've got a successful little shop."

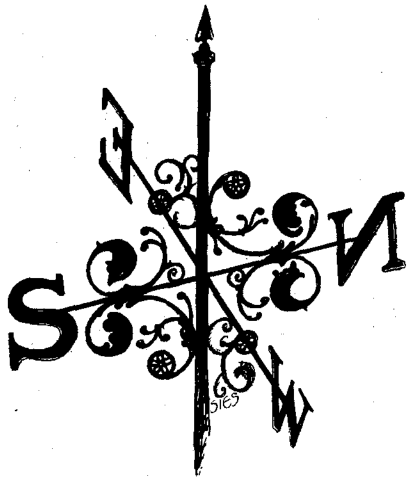
David nodded. "Right. I'll go for the saleable stuff and experiment later. I think I could raise a mortgage."

"There's no need," said Uncle Jamie. "I'll take what you've got and you can send me the rest as you earn it. You must have someone hard-working to run the shop, though. There's a lot to learn, even in a small shop."

David turned and looked at me. I could hardly breathe.

"Do you mind if I take Lorne into the garden?" he asked Uncle Jamie and Aunt Kate together. "There's something I want to say to her."

"I'm going to be offered a job," I said as gaily as I could, and followed David out of the room.



The garden was a blaze of sunshine. The roses were at their peak, perfuming the flagged path which wound between the beds of flowers. Beyond was the cool oasis of the top field. I waited for David to make one of his bantering remarks about a job in the shop. He slipped his arm through mine.

"I want to tell you that I love you," he said quietly. "I've loved you for a long time. I couldn't say anything before because I had nothing to offer you. I have now. Years of hard work, disappointments at times, but a life of fulfillment. For me, anyway. And I think it might be for you, too. Do you think you could care enough for me, Lorne?"

"I do already," I said simply.

We were married in Oakapple church, ancient, lichen-stained, with a roofed gateway and windows full of saints. Aunt Kate had asked a few of their friends of assorted ages, and put on a superb wedding breakfast. Mother came down, bringing silver spoons for a wedding present.

Everything was happening that day. Aunt Kate and Uncle Jamie were going off in the late afternoon. They had sent off a box in advance and would be taking only personal luggage on the plane. We were to have the furniture and linen and everything else they wouldn't need to take to Australia. Mother was driving with them to Heathrow in a hired car to see them off. The mini had been left with us. They had thought of everything.

The day passed like a dream. When everyone had gone, we stood for a time outside the shop. A moon was rising, silver-gilt against a sapphire sky. We turned and went through the shop and into the sitting room. The first thing we saw was a big envelope on the table. It was addressed to Mr. and Mrs. David Robb. David glanced at me, picked up the envelope and opened it.

Inside were folded documents, and an attached card:

Wedding Gift
for a
Dedicated Gardener
and His Wife

David opened the papers and we both read them, hardly able to believe it. Deeds for the shop and living-rooms were attached. The top field had been paid for with David's savings. There would be no installments to send out to beloved Uncle Jamie and Aunt Kate.

The sitting-room door to the garden was open. David put an arm round my shoulders and together we walked into the moonlit stillness along the flagged path to the top field.

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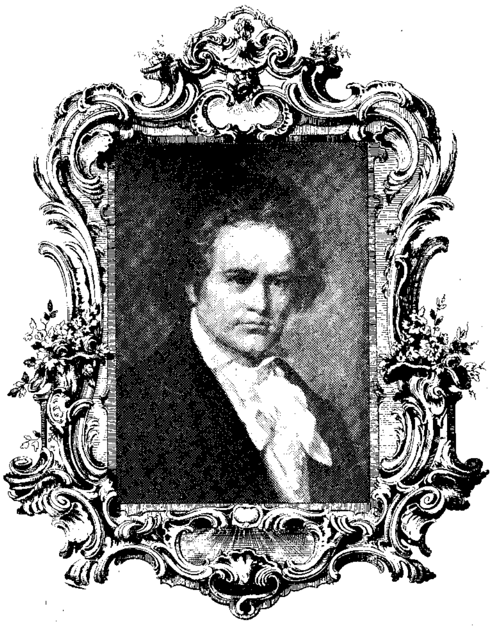


Celebrated Love Letters

BEETHOVEN'S IMMORTAL BELOVED

To whom were they written? Why were they never sent? What is behind the outpouring of this great musician's tortured spirit?

Ludwig van Beethoven gave the world some of its greatest music but it was at the cost of an anguished soul that lived in a tormented body. Beethoven was born both ugly and poor; he was also extremely sensitive and these factors combined may have been the reason the silent, shy, unhappy child turned into an ill-mannered, boorish man who hated people but couldn't live without them.

As a child Beethoven's education was limited to music and he was at the mercy of a drunkard father, who was himself a frustrated musician because he lacked the talent of his father, Beethoven's grandfather. The child Ludwig was forced to practice long hours on the piano and violin, despite the fact that his musical ability was unremarkable. He made a public appearance when he was eight; it was notably undistinguished.

When Beethoven went to Vienna in 1795 he was a dark, red faced, pockmarked squat figure, a youth of twenty-five with an atrocious provincial accent who employed deplorable manners, undoubtedly to cover up his very real inferiority complex. Despite the unromantic figure he cut, he was seldom out of love. One of the many woman he pursued, Magdalena Willmann rejected his offer of marriage, dismissing him as, "too ugly and half-mad."

Around 1801 Beethoven began to perceive the first symptoms of his deafness, a terrifying discovery. By now he had begun to be in demand as a pianist and was able to live much better than in his impoverished youth. The terrible burden of the discovery of his affliction was eased when Beethoven had the good fortune to fall in love "with an enchanting maiden who loves me, and whom I

By Laura Forsythe

love," as he wrote in a letter to a friend. At that time, Beethoven was thought to be in love with Guiliuetta Guicciardi, one of his pupils who was only sixteen or seventeen. Beethoven refused money for her lessons and would accept only linens from her, having been led to believe that she had sewn them herself. Guiliuetta would have married Beethoven but her parents forbade the marriage feeling the composer was a bad financial risk.

Guiliuetta may have been the "Dearly Beloved" of the letters—indeed, she epitomized, "all that was denied Beethoven forever—beauty, charm . . . and poise," but the letters bear no date and Beethoven was so often in love and so often rejected that it's impossible to be certain. Another contender for the recipient was Marie-Therese von Brunswick and still another Bettina von Arnim.

The composer of the *Eroica* and *Pastoral* symphonies, and the *Moonlight* and *Appassionata* had a nature as passionate and romantic as his music. He idealized women and fell madly in love with them but rarely was the sentiment returned. Perhaps his genius was at fault for it is impossible to imagine any woman able to put up with Beethoven's stormy, misanthropic nature.

Perhaps, too, Beethoven was at pains to conceal his true feelings. The letters, written in desperate succession and at the height of passion by a man who was articulate only in music and not in words, were never sent. They were found in a cash box after his death. Here, then, are the outpourings of a frantic would-be lover who is, to many, the world's master musician.

◆

July 6, in the morning [1801]

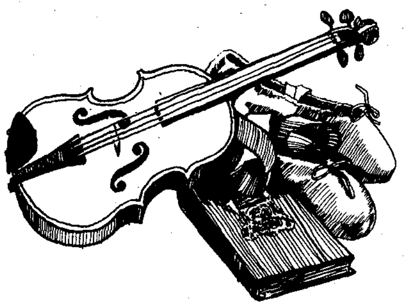
MY ANGEL, my all, my very self—only a few words today and at that with pencil (with yours)—not till tomorrow will my lodgings be definitively determined upon—what a useless waste of time. Why this deep sorrow where necessity speaks—can our love endure except through sacrifices—except through not demanding everything—can you change it that you are not wholly mine, I not wholly thine.

Oh, God! look out into the beauties of nature and comfort yourself with that which must be—love demands everything and that very justly—thus it is with me so far as you are concerned, and you with **me**. *If we were wholly united you would feel the pain of it as little as I. My journey was a fearful one; I did not reach here until 4 o'clock yesterday morning; lacking horses the post coach chose another route—but what an awful one.*

At the stage before the last I was warned not to travel at night—made fearful of a forest, but that only made me the more eager and I was wrong; the coach must needs break down on the wretched road, a bottomless mud road—without such postilions as I had with me I should have stuck in the road. Esterhazy, traveling the usual road hitherward, had the same fate with eight horses that I had with four—yet I got some pleasure out of it, as I always do when I successfully overcome difficulties.

Now a quick change to things internal from things external. We shall soon surely see each other; moreover, I cannot communicate to you the observations I have made during the last few days touching my own life—if our hearts were always close together I would make none of the kind. My heart is full of many things to say to you—Ah!—there are moments when I feel that speech is nothing after all—cheer up—remain my true, my only treasure, my all as I am yours; the gods must send us the rest that which shall be best for us.

Your faithful Ludwig



Evening, Monday, July 6

YOU are suffering, my dearest creature—only now have I learned that letters must be posted very early in the morning. Mondays, Thursdays—the only days on which the mail coach goes from here to K. You are suffering—Ah! wherever I am there you are also. I shall arrange affairs between us so that I shall live and live with you, what a life!!!! thus!!!! thus without you—pursued by the goodness of mankind hither and thither—which I as little try to deserve as I deserve it.

Humility of man toward man—it pains me—and when I consider myself in connection with the universe, what am I and what is he whom we call the greatest—and yet—herein lies the divine in man. I weep when I reflect that you will probably not receive the first intelligence from me until Saturday—much as you love me, I love you more—but do not ever conceal your thoughts from me—good night—as I am taking the baths I must go to bed. Oh, God! so near so far! Is our love not truly a celestial edifice—firm as Heaven's vault.

Good morning, on July 7

THOUGH still in bed my thoughts go out to you, my Immortal Beloved, now and then joyfully, then sadly, waiting to learn whether or not fate will hear us. I can live only wholly with you or not at all—yes, I am resolved to wander so long away from you until I can fly to your arms and say that I am really at home, send my soul enwrapped in you into the land of spirits.—Yes, unhappily it must be so—you will be the more resolved since you know my fidelity—to you, no one can ever again possess my heart—none—never—Oh, God! why is it necessary to part from one whom one so loves and yet my life in W. [Vienna] is now a wretched life—your love makes me at once the happiest and the unhappiest of men—at my age, I need a steady, quiet life—can that be under our conditions? My angel, I have just been told that the mail coach goes every day—and I must close at once so that you may receive the L. at once. Be calm, only by a calm consideration of our existence can we achieve our purpose to live together—be calm—love me—today—yesterday—what tearful longings for you—you—you—my life—my all—farewell—Oh continue to love me—never misjudge the most faithful heart of your beloved L.

ever thine
ever mine
ever for each other

THE IRON GATES

A CAMEO NOVEL

(Continued from page 16)

were not the order of the day and, aware that they would all know who she was, Katherine felt at a disadvantage. She was also somewhat out of her element, and not at all sure how best to rise above the situation. She chose silence as her ally in regaining her composure, her doubts about the wisdom of coming here increasing.

After her silent dinner as she was crossing the hall, she met Lawrence Rushton and was at once on guard. He appeared, however, disposed to be courteous.

"Ah, you're punctual. This way . . ."

He held open the study door so she might precede him. Her eyes went immediately to the typewriter, set on a heavy desk, and she crossed to it.

"Your precious toy!" Mr. Rushton exclaimed, and she observed a hint of amusement in his eyes.

"It's not a plaything," she retorted, and was surprised to hear him laugh before coming toward her.

"Of course not—vital equipment!" She saw how slender his fingers were as his left hand struck the keys.

He sighed, after a moment's dallying, "Vital, indeed—for me, indispensable."

She realized then the importance of her role; how otherwise could an author with no right hand pursue his career?

"Well, to work now . . . " Without further delay, he seated himself behind a grand desk facing her own. "Are you acquainted with my books?"

Katherine avoided his gaze; there hadn't been time, not with so many things to prepare.

"I was busy."

"Of course." He cut her short, then went to one of the many bookshelves. Selecting a volume, he gave it to her.

"Read that at your leisure. Meanwhile, we must begin—it's long enough since I touched this." His voice had dropped. "It's slow, Miss Sutcliffe, too slow for my liking. There's no flow—the words seem halting by the time I've . . ." He stopped, seemed to collect himself.

"A novel, this is. I've been examining my notes again, knowing you were coming. How quick are you, Miss Sutcliffe, can you take down the work from my reading of it?"

"I can try." Katherine smiled at him. Starting to read, his voice took on a different tone, caring, concerned, loving the phrases.

Katherine concentrated on the actual words, rather than their meaning, until accustomed to his methods. Once familiar with transcribing it onto the paper in her machine, though, its spell captured her. Out of nowhere, or so it seemed, into the quiet room, came beauty and understanding—even humor. From this cool, enigmatic man people were emerging—people he loved, whom she might love. Good people, bad, weak and strong and all of them real human beings.

Yet, not a moment after the grandfather clock in the hall had chimed ten, the spell he had woven with his novel ended as abruptly as it had begun. "And that is all for this evening, then," he said, rising from his desk abruptly and leaving the room before Katherine was able to gather the manuscript pages, much less bid him goodnight.

Getting into bed half an hour later in the cold little room at the top of the house, Katherine tried to sort out her thoughts. She felt in a muddle—on the one hand put off by this largely rude and condescending man; and on the other hand, his art as a novelist was clearly admirable. Should she stay on as his typist because of the latter trait? Or should she resign tomorrow because of the former? The questions still raged in her mind as sleep overcame her . . .

In the night she wakened suddenly, hearing a scream followed by sobbing. The crying continued—from the room beneath her own, she thought—precluding sleep until she decided something or somebody must stop it.

Sighing, Katherine got out of bed, lit the candle, shivered, and slipped a robe over her nightgown. Somebody in this great house was alone and afraid, and nobody cared—but she would not let that continue. The crying sounded like a child's. She recalled her sister Clare's nightmares and how, sharing a room as they had, the younger child had clung to her for comfort.

The house creaked eerily when she stepped onto the landing, as if it too were uneasy and restless. It was no difficult task to follow down the stairs and locate the room which must be beneath her own. At the door she hesitated, listening; still the sobbing went on.

Katherine eased the door open, her candle softly illuminating the area immediately inside the door. The bed, curtained with velvet draperies, stood several feet away. She crept toward it, and drew aside the velvet. Dark eyes, startlingly familiar, regarded her warily from beneath wet lashes. Near-black hair clung damply to the pale forehead—a forehead also familiar, the miniature of one she'd studied but a few hours ago.

Katherine smiled. "Hello—what's your name?"

"Simon Rushton."

"And you wakened in the night, alone . . ."

He nodded. "I was dreaming. I'm frightened. Where's Janet? Who are you . . . why isn't she here?"

The face crumpled, tears threatening again. Katherine sat on the edge of the bed, gathered the small body to her.

"I'm Katherine—but you may call me Katy. Who's Janet?"

"Nanny, of course, only Father won't let her sleep in the next room anymore. He says I'm not to behave like a silly infant."

Katherine could imagine Lawrence Rushton's hard voice saying that. The man hadn't a morsel of tenderness.

In the night stillness she remembered the book he was writing, his insight into its characters, his sympathy toward them. She hugged the child closer. Why had this man feeling only for the people his pen created? Why was he so unyielding toward those he encountered daily—toward this child, one person who surely needed his affection and understanding?

She stroked the soft, dark hair, but the child wriggled, trying to free himself.

"You may go away. I only **wanted** Janet."

"But are you going to sleep now, like a good boy?"

A wail set up, Simon thrashing his arms wildly, trying to be rid of her. "Janet!"the boy yelled. "I want you, Janet!"

Slippered feet came running toward the room, a young woman burst through the door. "Master Simon, what is all this nonsense?"

She stopped on seeing Katherine. It was the girl who had been sitting beside the coachman in the kitchen.

"Did Simon disturb you?" she asked, seeming embarrassed.

Katherine smiled. "I had to discover what was wrong." She crossed toward the door.

At the bed, Janet was rocking the boy in her arms. Her eyes met Katherine's over his head. "Poor mite—no wonder he has nightmares in this place, with the likes of the master for a . . ."

Katherine glanced pointedly at Simon, who couldn't avoid hearing this criticism of his parent. Janet nodded, sighing. "Best keep quiet, you're right—but my heart aches for the child, it does really."

Since she could fulfill no useful purpose there, Katherine returned to her room; but not to sleep. What kind of man was Lawrence Rushton to deny his son the comfort of a nurse at hand, when the little boy was prone to waking up scared of everything?

Katherine's perplexity increased daily, for she saw nothing further of Simon—and there was no sign of Mrs. Rushton.

On Saturday morning, Katherine rose early and, since Mr. Rushton intended working without her help on an essay for a London journal, she decided to explore the park.

She headed toward the lake, enjoying the sunshine now tempering the autumn chill and rejoicing in her newly acquired walking skirt for, hitched up on cords as it was, it afforded so much freedom.

Reared in the picturesque Yorkshire Dales, Katherine was happy to find herself in beautiful countryside. She had known little about Kent before making her home in this mansion and was surprised to find it not flat as she'd been led to believe but enhanced by hills. These were less awe-inspiring than her Northern ones, agreed, but they were hills nevertheless.

As for the lake, which she was now nearing, it was but small in comparison with the tarn beyond her own home, but still attractive.

The deer she'd noticed from the window that first day aroused her interest most of all; previously she had seen them only in paintings. Silently, she stole through the trees, trying to get closer to them. She was nearing a placid fawn with its attendant doe when a peal of laughter startled them and the pair darted away.

"Oh, they've gone!" Katherine exclaimed, as Janet, with Simon, came toward her. "You've scared them!" But she smiled to see the boy's happy face.

Simon laughed again, seeming—away from the house—a different child. "They won't go right away, they'll come back," he told her. "They belong to Father."

"Does everything here belong to your father?" Katherine asked.

Janet laughed, answering for him, "Every blade of grass, every stick, stone . . . you, me . . ."

Katherine frowned. "Is that what you really think?"

She shrugged. "Does that worry you? Being owned by him—or almost so?"

"But I am not," Katherine asserted.

"He pays your wages, doesn't he? And pays them well for the 1870s."

"That's as may be, but I am not tied to him."

"You're fortunate." Janet paused wistfully. "Have you folks of your own then?"

"In Yorkshire—my mother and father, and a sister."

"There's the difference—I've nobody. It would have been the workhouse for me, if I hadn't picked up a few things about being a nanny."

Katherine felt sudden compassion for the girl. She hid her problems behind a cheerful face, and obviously had great affection for her young charge.

Katherine touched the other woman's arm. "But you've made friends here . . ."

"What? With that lot? The servants in some of these places think they're a cut above their masters."

Katherine smiled. "Oh—I thought they just resented me!"

Janet laughed. "They give everyone that treatment when they arrive—and later on, if you don't sweeten them up."

She nodded to Simon romping in the grass, and suddenly darted off in chase of him.

The boy's delighted laughter rang out, and as Janet ran this way and that over the springy turf, Katherine envied her. It would be good to share the fun of a lively child's company.

"Come!" Janet called to her.

They ran and laughed, dodging between the trees til Simon himself called a halt by falling breathless to the damp ground.

Janet scooped him up. "Come along. Time for your milk, young sir." She turned to Katherine and smiled. "See you at the kitchen table this evening . . ." She hesitated. "Tell you what—if you've a mind, come to my room this afternoon. It's the last one past Simon's. We could sit and talk, get to know one another."

Janet was always absent from the somewhat frugal midday meal in the kitchen, taking luncheon and tea in the nursery with Master Simon. Katherine almost envied her. The boy would chatter on, she was sure, while here the servants took pains to avoid conversation.

The meal over, she went to her room and sat at the window. This was becoming her favorite place indoors; looking out over this part of the weald, she could ignore the drab box of a room allocated to her.

At two-thirty she made her way to the next floor, deciding to see Janet that afternoon while Simon was resting. She knocked on Janet's door, but there was no response so she waited and knocked again. About to move away, Katherine heard voices coming up the stairs. Mr. Rushton's was one of them, and he was patently very angry. The other was Janet's, sounding close to tears.

Katherine had no wish to remain as witness to an embarrassing scene; she glanced around for an escape, noticing another door to her right at the end of the corridor.

The handle turned, though with difficulty, as if unused for some long time. But the room afforded her sanctuary and in a flurry of skirts, Katherine hastened inside.

Looking about her, she drew a quick, astonished breath. She stood in a gallery some sixty feet long. Its sparse furniture stood shrouded in dust sheets, and cobwebs hung from ceiling and curtains. On opposite walls hung oil paintings, landscapes and portraits.

With mounting interest, she progressed from one picture to the next. Some landscapes she recognized as being of the park or surrounding countryside, one showing the front of the house as it must have appeared some years ago. The next puzzled her; again it was of the house, but painted from another angle—possibly from the rear. It revealed even more spaciousness than she had imagined.

Many of the portraits looked antiquated and proved to be dated during the last and the preceding century. She was intrigued. Knowing little of Mr. Rushton's family, she would like to learn something of his antecedents.

Katherine explored, working her way first along one wall and then returning to scrutinize the pictures along the other.

Near the door were several blank spaces. The wallcovering was darker where frames had been removed. She hesitated, wondering why, til her attention was captured by another portrait. It showed a young woman of most pleasing countenance with a man standing at her side. His identity was unmistakable. The inscription was at the base of the frame; its date revealed the portrait as being four years old. Lawrence Rushton's eyes were as today, dark, brilliant, challenging, the high forehead proclaiming the knowledge and wisdom stored within—only then it appeared to have been unfurrowed.

The head was neat, the dark hair rather longer than at present, the face without whiskers. But how the mouth differed. Katherine narrowed her eyes and stared afresh. The lips here curved into a slight, generous smile, not the taut, thin, line she knew.

Her eyes strayed again to the woman, noting the coffee-colored lace of her gown, the face framed by corn-colored curls. A lovely face—high cheekbones, enormous blue eyes and the prettiest mouth, which seemed strangely familiar. But, of course, it was Simon's mouth. What a handsome couple they made.

Katherine mused on the curious way she had neither seen, nor heard mention of, the mistress of the house, and as she stepped back for another view of the portrait something caught her attention.

Lawrence Rushton rested one hand on his wife's shoulder, and the other at his side.

Saddened, Katherine again studied his face. Perhaps his terrible injury had changed the set of his mouth. This could be the reason why his lips curled no longer in humor. "You should close the door behind you if you wish to remain undetected."

The voice at her elbow startled her and set her heart thumping. She turned to look into those dark, demanding eyes, and trembled.

"I was . . . interested," she responded.

A half-smile played on his mouth, fleetingly, and vanished.

Katherine looked once more at the picture. "Your wife is very beautiful."

"I have no wife." Lawrence Rushton turned toward the door. "Rivers must attend to the lock. I will not have this door left open."

"That would be very wise, Mr. Rushton. There must be great value in these paintings," Katherine said carefully as they moved into the corridor.

She glanced up in time to see his eyes return to the woman in the portrait. Then he closed the door silently. "For me, Miss Sutcliffe, nothing in there holds the slightest value."

"He's so hard, Katherine, you wouldn't believe how hard, with his son," Janet began, her gray eyes ablaze. "Simon's not wicked. He's a little angel compared to some I've known, but the way Rushton treats him."

Katherine forced her attention to what the other girl was saying as they sat either side of the window in Janet's room.

"He rarely visits the nursery, but when he does . . . my, there's always a regular squall! This time Master Simon had left a tiny piece of cabbage, that was all, only such a bit . . ."

"Children must be made to eat properly," Katherine heard herself say.

Janet would have none of it. "I had to say something. I couldn't keep the words back, with little Simon shaking and quivering before the father he adores so. Told Mr. Rushton straight, I did—how I thought he was being too firm with the little fellow." She smiled ruefully. "He turned on me then—rather have that, I would. He don't scare, Mr. High-and-Mighty Rushton."

"Maybe there's a reason for his behavior," Katherine suggested, wanting to be fair in her appraisal of him.

◆

May never was the month of love,
For May is full of flowers;
But rather April, wet by kind,
For love is full of showers.

Robert Southwell
Love's Servile Lot

The other girl snorted. "What? When he makes poor Simon stay in two rooms, in a great house the like of this? As if he can't bear to set eyes on the boy. Now tell me that's not harsh, and him his own father!"

Katherine sighed. Lawrence Rushton did indeed appear unduly unkind—but she did not wish to dwell on that. So much had mystified her since the arrival, she wanted to learn more from Janet.

Choosing her words carefully, she began, "I haven't seen Mr. Rushton's wife about the house. Is she away?"

Head on one side, Janet considered Katherine pityingly before saying, "You mean, you don't know there's some . . . secret about her?

"No. Tell me."

"It's only what George—the coachman, you know—says. It seems the master will not have her name mentioned. Nobody knows why, or if they do they're not saying. Like you, I was curious when I first came here, and began asking. None of the others have seen her—unless it's Mr. Rivers. He's been here a long time. Mrs. Hawkins shut up tight as a drum when I asked her. Told me to mind my own business. I think she knows more than she's prepared to tell, though, and I believe old John knows the whole story, but he won't talk—ever."

"What do you suppose then?" Katherine asked. "Has Mrs. Rushton left him—run off with someone else, maybe?"

"If you ask me," Janet replied, her voice hushed, "he's got her locked away."

"Here?"

"He comes close to that with young Master Simon!"

Janet's suspicions made Katherine even more uneasy, and this disturbed her. But why should it? It didn't affect her employer's treatment of her in any way—and if some mystery surrounded his matrimonial state that was scarcely her concern.

Next morning in the estate's church, Katherine found her eyes focused on a beautifully carved screen during most of the service—a service which she found uninspiring, the sermon long and unspeakably tedious. The handsome columns of timber, surmounted by a life-size crucifix, however, captured her attention.

Glad to be out in the air after the dank building, Katherine walked toward the house, recalling the pictures she had seen in the long gallery. From this direction it appeared larger than she'd first thought, and what she'd taken for the rear of the house in one of the paintings had been this east side. Its construction was unusual, the great main doors being set at one end of the building.

It was not yet midday so, coming closer, Katherine allowed curiosity to lead her on to the terrace adjoining the east wall.

A wind swept across the rolling parkland from the north, buffeting her, and she drew her cloak more tightly around her. She walked quickly, pausing only now and again to glance up at the high, arched windows to her left. There was nothing extraordinary about them—nor, she was thinking, about the house itself . . .

She lowered her head, briefly, against a particularly strong gust of wind.

When she raised it, looking sideways again, she gasped.

The building here was only a shell. Its windows, devoid of glass, were stone outlines of their former beauty. Katherine tiptoed across the grass toward the wall to peer inside. This part of the house was open to the sky. She saw a crumbling fireplace and a door hanging half off its hinges.

The floor was made up of slabs of stone covered with dust and bird droppings. Something scurried into a corner. She shuddered. The place fascinated her, nonetheless, and she tried to see farther over to the right where this empty room led to another.

Too late, she heard the thud of hooves, then a horse's breath behind her. Lawrence Rushton halted his mount.

"Miss Sutcliffe!"

Katherine swung round to meet his gaze, poised for flight. Slowly he dismounted, allowed the mare to nibble the grass contentedly, patted the animal's side, then ambled toward Katherine.

"And who but you, my dear young lady, would be so inquisitive?"

She met his eyes once more, unflinchingly now. Her mouth twitched but she stilled the smile. "Would you, sir, with your trained inquisitive mind, which notes every detail, storing it to use in your novels—would you, with your interest in people and their surroundings, deny me my piece of curiosity?"

He opened his mouth to speak, then closed it, nonplussed. He scrutinized her through half-closed lids, as though narrowing his gaze to direct it the more keenly. And then, astonishing her, threw back his head and roared with laughter.

"You have a clever tongue, Miss Sutcliffe, and the courage to use it." He paused, smiling still. "How sick I am of mumbling, fearful women. Only remember, my curiosity is professional."

"And do you think mine couldn't be, sir?" she went on, her color rising. "Do you then reserve for yourself the right to express *every* observation in words?"

Lawrence Rushton was clearly taken aback. So, she might confess, was Katherine herself. She knew not what demon was possessing her to say these things.

"Prove it then," he challenged. "I'll give you a month to place your manuscript on my desk."

Katherine was on the point of admitting that she'd been teasing, that she really had no such intention, when it occurred to her that this could serve her well. If—just supposing— *if* she succeeded in putting pen to paper in a manner to attract his attention, he might cease treating her like one of the servants.

She took a deep breath and nodded. "I will do my best, sir—just as I intend always to try to please you . . . "

Lawrence Rushton shook his head. "That's the wrong answer, Miss Kate—altogether too demure and submissive."

That evening, Katherine wandered restlessly round her tiny room. She went to the volume loaned her by Mr. Rushton, and as yet unread. "Tomorrow," she promised herself, "tomorrow I will begin that."

But even then, she had no time. Monday was a difficult day. Mr. Rushton narrated all day long, and as much as she loved his words, flowing through her machine onto the paper, there was never time to dwell on them.

At odd moments during the week she reflected on the absence of Mr. Rushton, on the closed gallery, on the ruined east wing, wondering how they all fit into the picture of life there.

It was strange, too, that most of the servants had been employed here for only two years or so. It seemed Mr. Rushton had rid himself of the entire staff in one fell swoop.

◆

Love is a proud and gentle thing, a better
thing to own
Than all of the wide impossible stars
over the heavens blown

Orrick Johns
The Door

She found that she would scold herself for this mental prying. It was, after all, none of her affair; she had been retained to transcribe Mr. Rushton's novels, nothing more. His personal life was beyond her interest.

One evening, coming away from dinner, Janet drew Katherine aside in the hall.

"How are you spending this evening?"

Katherine shrugged. "Reading for a while, and then . . . well, nothing important. Why?"

"So the master doesn't expect you to keep him company?"

Katherine laughed at the notion. "Indeed not."

"I see." Janet appeared thoughtful. She hesitated. "I wonder if I dare ask you about tonight. It's a favor, really."

"Yes?"

The girl's voice dropped to a whisper. "George and I are going out. We don't get much time to ourselves and I wondered . . . You see, he's got permission to use the brougham and go into Maidstone to visit his mother, and he wanted to take me, only . . . "

"Somebody must remain here with Master Simon."

She nodded. "I know it's my job, but he hardly ever wakens, and I'd make it up to you . . . pay you . . . "

"Nonsense," Katherine insisted. "If you and George are going out, I'll sit with the boy gladly."

"Oh, not sit with him—just be in my room—in case he calls out, you'll hear him."

Remembering Simon's cries the other night, Katherine could believe that.

Taking the book Mr. Rushton had entrusted to her, she went along to Janet's room and settled to while away the hours. Larger than her own, the room was more comfortable and—more important to Katherine—lit by a gas mantle. At almost nine-thirty her reading was interrupted by calling out for Janet.

"Katy!" he exclaimed, when she drew aside the velvet bed-hanging. Her heart warmed to his pleasure.

"Where is Janet?" he asked.

"I've come instead. Will I do?"

The child held his head on one side, his eyes weighing her, then nodded, grinning. "Tell me a story."

Katherine searched for a story that might amuse him, but recollected only one thing, her own childhood. She began narrating how a little girl was born in a farm worker's cottage, far away in the Yorkshire Dales. She told of the fun of playing with the animals, of watching her father milk the cows or feed their one goat, of riding atop the big shire horse when he was plowing. The boy listened, fascinated by this life so unlike his own, until his eyelids lowered on softly rounded cheeks and he turned over, rolling into a ball, his breathing slow and even.

Katherine smiled down at the sleeping boy. Then, with a stab of pain, wondered how Mr. Rushton could treat him harshly.

She had been back in Janet's room but half an hour when the girl returned, and Katherine prepared to leave. They talked for a few minutes, then Katherine bade Janet goodnight, and picked up her candle.

Something metallic, shining in the gloomy corridor, caught her eye. Holding the candle aloft, she glanced round. It was a bunch of keys, hanging from the lock of the gallery door.

Katherine felt impelled to reexamine the double portrait of her employer and his absent wife. Silently, she opened the door and advanced a few steps into the gallery.

She stood, she did not know how long, gazing at the candlelit images of Mr. Rushton and his wife. Simon's likeness to Mrs. Rushton was almost uncanny.

A breeze fluttered the gallery's curtains, swept over the ghostly dust covers and whisked a sheet of paper from a shrouded table along the floor. It stopped at Katherine's feet. She stooped down to pick it up, then, realizing that the draft was coming from a partially open door at the far end of the room, hurried toward it; a curtain partially obscured an old wooden door. She reached out a hand to pull it shut.

"Miss Sutcliffe!"

His voice echoed around the gallery as his footsteps clicked across the marble floor. "Keep away from that door!"

Raged filled her then. "What are you afraid I might see, sir?" she asked, summoning her last ounce of courage under his harsh gaze.

In the vague light, his eyes seemed to be laughing. "All right, then, Miss Curiosity-seeker, shall we open it?" He drew back the faded curtain that hung before the door and, raising his own candle, pushed the door open. "Raise your candle so you might take in every detail," he said.

Before her was a void—a vertical tunnel, without floors, windows, or ceiling. A bat or a night hawk swooped down toward her candle just as it flickered out. Mr. Rushton set his candle on the floor—and pulled the creaking door shut. "This door remains closed," he said, "because it is clearly a danger."

Without another word, and without any attempt to quell Katherine's trembling, Mr. Rushton led her from the gallery, locking the door firmly behind them while she held his candle.At the stairs, he bid her a curt goodnight.

Katherine considered packing her belongings the moment she entered her little room. Surely, she would be dismissed first thing in the morning. But the terror at seeing that yawning darkness beyond the door had got the best of her, and she fell exhausted into bed and sleep.

The next morning, when Katherine stepped more timidly than usual into Mr. Rushton's study, his only remark was "I believe we were midway through Chapter Six, Miss Sutcliffe, and you are five minutes late."

"But, I—" She cut herself short and slipped into the chair in front of her typing machine. So, he wasn't going to dismiss her, after all; at least not this morning—perhaps not until he had found a suitable replacement. That was it, of course. He would have to find someone to replace her before he would let her go.

The day dragged on unmercifully as she took his narrative down on paper. Somehow, the words did not spark her to inspiration today. All she could think of was where she would find her next employment. Of course, a woman with her skills would not have too much trouble; she could always work in a London solicitor's office—it was said that they not only were using typing machines in that profession, but that women, if they were especially talented at the skill, could actually find employment there.

When he had finished the dictation for the day, Katherine decided to approach him and attempt to apologize for the night before. Perhaps she could convince him that she was not the irresponsible girl he obviously thought she was.

"Mr. Rushton," she began, approaching his desk. "There is something I must—"

He looked up from his desk and held up his hand. "Yes," he nodded impassively. "Yes, I believe I understand. I had no idea Mrs. Hawkins had given you a room on the top floor. It surely cannot be very comfortable for you." A glimmer of a smile touched his lips. "I have arranged that you be moved to the room next to Janet's."

Dumbfounded, Katherine could only nod at him. Finally, she managed, "Thank you, Mr. Rushton."

Once settled into her new room—a spacious, well-lit accommodation decorated in shades of green, which overlooked the same view as her attic room had—Katherine's spirits lifted. She and Janet visited together more often, and when Janet stepped out with George, Katherine was always accessible to fill in for her.She found that she was becoming quite a good storyteller for Simon on those evenings.

The work went along well, too, and once again Katherine found herself swept away by Mr. Rushton's writing. All thoughts of being dismissed from his employ vanished as the weeks sped by, until one morning, when Mr. Rushton said, "It has been one month, Miss Sutcliffe."

Visions of seeking employment in a solicitor's office swam before her eyes, and she barely heard his next words.

"One month since you promised to have a manuscript on my desk. Well?"

Katherine had to jog her memory. A manuscript? Oh, yes . . . she had made that daring promise. Could a month have passed already? "Oh, that. Yes, I'm still trying . . ." She vowed to herself to write something, anything, in the next few days. "Soon," she said. "You will have it soon."

"If you can produce one," he said, a hint of laughter in his voice. "But now, to work," and he began his narration for the day.

That evening she took pen and paper to the table in the room she had already grown to love. She sat for an hour, trying to think of some story, some essay, but nothing came. So, he was right after all—she could not produce a manuscript. "It's so easy telling a story to Master Simon," she sighed, "but this is impossible."

All the next day, Katherine waited apprehensively for the suitable moment to admit she had been wrong, that her words of challenge had been mere braggadocio, but each time she opened her mouth to speak, she stopped short, certain of Mr. Rushton's mockery.

It wasn't until the evening, after dinner, that she decided to confess her inability to produce a manuscript. In the downstairs hall she encountered Rivers. "Is Mr. Rushton in the drawing room?" she asked the imperious manservant nervously.

"Yes." His scowl, as he turned to announce her presence, told her precisely what he thought of her. Dislike was too gentle a word for it.

He spoke no word on reappearing but—holding the door ajar just sufficiently for her entry—indicated she might go inside.

Katherine was thankful for long skirts that concealed the shaking of her legs. She did not at once see him, sitting as he was beside the log fire, his back toward her.

Lawrence Rushton didn't look up, but asked her to be seated. Katherine perched on the edge of one of the hard chairs, as she had at that previous interview, and waited.

He was studying a stiffly bound ledger, his lips moving silently as he totaled columns of figures. He was frowning.

Taking this as an ill omen, Katherine allowed a sigh to escape.

He glanced round for her. "Oh, Miss Sutcliffe—really!" he exclaimed. "Could you not unbend sufficiently to sit on a more comfortable chair?"

She blinked at his words, rose. He beckoned and inclined his head toward the armchair across from his own.

"Will this do?" she inquired, as she seated herself, happy to learn she need have no fear of him. For the moment.

A smile flickered at his mouth. "Admirably!"

She dropped her eyes to the hands clasped in her lap. "Well?" he prompted her, at length. Then, when she sat there speechlessly fumbling for a beginning, "I cannot imagine why you seek me out after a whole day of my company."

Despite herself, Katherine laughed. She felt color flooding her cheeks and tried foolishly to excuse it, turning a little from the fire.

"What is it, Katherine?"

She rose, moved away from his watchful eyes. "You assumed correctly—I am totally incapable of writing even one word of a manuscript!"

There—she'd blurted out the truth, let him laugh at her.

But Rushton was so long silent that she turned from the window at which she'd found herself.

He only shrugged, without speaking. "So—you're not surprised."

"I asked you to sit. Won't you?" he interrupted, smiling. When she had complied, he continued, "Beware of that tongue of yours, even when provoked —don't let it trap you into rash statements. As for your being unable to put pen to paper . . . I confess to relief. Had you proved competent, I'd have felt compelled to prove *my* ability with *your* typewriter . . . and so on, *infinitum,* and to extreme tedium." He came to stand before her. "Life is not so obvious a competition." He put on a severe expression, though she suspected he was not entirely serious. "But permit me to reprimand you on another account," he added, and Katherine felt her heart sink. What could it be now? He continued: "A woman pioneering in business skills should learn also to speak less timorously to a servant."

He turned then, escorting her to the door. "Do not allow Rivers to get the better of you."

She nodded. "He is rather—formidable."

"So are you, Miss Sutcliffe, when you allow yourself to be." He bade her goodnight, and she went upstairs to her room, both lifted and confused by the advice and counsel he had given her.

On the following Friday, Lawrence Rushton departed for London, taking Katherine into his confidence as he issued instructions for the work to be completed in his absence.

"I have urgent business with my publishers and with the fellow who has charge of my finances."

Something about his ready explanation made her wonder, fleetingly, if it had been offered simply to allay her curiosity.

◆

Self is the only prison that can ever bind the soul;
Love is the only angel who can bid the gates unroll;
And when he comes to call thee, arise and follow fast;
His way may lie through darkness, but it leads to light at last.

Henry van Dyke
The Prison and the Angel

In his absence, she found that the mysteries surrounding Mr. Rushton and his life intrigued her anew. What had happened to Mrs. Rushton? Was he going to London, in truth, to see her? If that were true, why was she in London? Why was it that no one would speak about it? And what was it that made him decide to keep part of the house a ruin instead of restoring it? Perhaps the caretaker and his wife, John and Sarah Saunders, would enlighten her if she paid them a visit.

Sarah, after her initial surprise at seeing Katherine at her door, seemed pleased that she had come, and soon had the kettle on the fire. Chatting in the snug parlor, Katherine led the conversation around to the years Sarah had worked in Mr. Rushton's house.

"I understand," she said finally, "that Mrs. Rushton was very beautiful. Fair hair, blue eyes—whatever became of her?"

Anxiously, the older woman regarded her. Shaking her head, she said, "No, Miss, I beg you, don't ask questions about her."

"But why?" Katherine insisted. "Why won't anyone speak of her—not even her own husband?"

"Please, forget all about Mrs. Rushton. Prying will come to no good." Her eyes filled with concern, she continued. "Your presence here has done the master much good. Leave it at that, and all will be better off."

After those words, Sarah turned the conversation to other topics, and Katherine realized that no more information would come from her lips.

The next day, after she had finished transcribing the notes Mr. Rushton had left for her, she looked about the grounds for Janet. Perhaps she knew more than she was letting on. She found her with Simon, near the stables.

"Tell me again, Janet," she said after they had played tag with Simon until he tired enough to rest under a shade tree, "what do you think happened to Mrs. Rushton?"

"It's like I said," the girl whispered, "he's either got her locked up somewhere, or . . . maybe she ran off with someone. Why else would he be so bitter a man? Maybe she got burned in the fire, and he won't let her show her face."

"The fire?"

Janet swept her hand toward the ruined part of the house. "The fire that destroyed all that."

But Janet had no idea when the fire had been. The building had been as it was now when she arrived.

The rest of the week went by without

producing any answers to the mysteries which Lawrence Rushton protected so well; and when he returned from London late Thursday night, a new mystery arose.

Katherine was approaching the dining room where he was taking a late dinner, in order to ask him after the next day's schedule. She stopped short, hearing voices—raised voices coming from inside. One was clearly Mr. Rushton's, but it took a moment before she recognized the other as that of Rivers.

She tried not to listen, but she could not miss the shout of, "You're dismissed—get away from here. I'll have no more of this!"

"Oh, yes, sir, you will!" Rivers retorted, his tone masterly, not subservient. "You'll keep me here, and pay, Mr. Rushton—to avoid the alternative."

Was this blackmail? It sounded very much like it. Distressing in itself, the thought conjured up greater distress. Nobody was ever blackmailed unless they were hiding something terribly important. Katherine sighed, wondering what was amiss now in this strange household. Then she heard its master shouting again.

"Take it then, and be done—and I warn you, and Barnabas, this is the last you'll have from me!"

Katherine slept fitfully that night, disturbed by the encounter she had inadvertently heard between Rivers and Mr. Rushton. Debating with herself whether she should stay on in a house so filled with intrigue, she finally decided to wait another week, not to be so easily frightened off by these mysteries. They were, as Sarah had implied, not her concern. She was here only to transcribe Mr. Rushton's writings.

The following morning, as she was going downstairs for breakfast, she was met by another surprise. Mr. Rushton stopped her on the way to the kitchen, and she barely had time to murmur a "Welcome home, sir," when a slight but rare smile touched his lips and he said, "Miss Sutcliffe, I'm sorry I was unable to speak with you last night, coming in as late as I did"—apparently, then, he had no idea she'd overheard his quarrel with Rivers—"but I have made a change in the household which I hope meets your approval."

"My approval? Why, sir, I am sure that any changes you make in your household are not subject to my—"

"No," he laughed, shaking his head, "you misunderstand. The change concerns you. You will be taking your meals in the dining room from now on with me. If," he added hastily, "such an arrangement meets your approval."

"You are right, sir, I do misunderstand, and continue to."

He turned his head, apparently embarrassed. "It's because—" he began, and paused. "It is because we will be entering a, shall we say, more intensive period on the novel, and . . . I believe things will work better this way."

Bewildered by his sudden change in attitude—his nearly amiable mood—Katherine nodded. "As you wish, of course." She managed a smile and followed him into the elegant dining room.

The Honor Of Your Presence

by Mildred Nelson

If the event could be pinned down in memory,
In time's deep-freeze,
Captured, caught, fixed—
Then how?
With colors? Music? Tapestry?
With taste of wine and smell of roses mingled?
Or surge of organ, sudden hush, and silence?
The words clear spoken?
Or, rainbow riot of gold-green-white-turquoise—
Spectrum of hues, the essence?
Which bittersweet delight to keep, which hold?

Oh, hold them all intact!
But hold most fast that moment of meeting!
Strange, it seems somehow,
Their arriving separately at last,
These two,
Almost . . .
Almost . . .
And smiling now,
They meet.

The ring, the book, the vows, the kiss,
All are but accessories to this.

◆

"And," he added, "I've told Rivers that as long as you will be taking your meals with me, I shall not require his services here."

Over breakfast—which Katherine served from the sideboard—he told her of his meeting with his publisher, and how pleased he was with the novel's progress. "I might add, he is terribly impressed that I shall be delivering one of the first typescripts ever to grace his company."

Katherine started to say something, but he interrupted, "Do not worry, Miss Sutcliffe, I have informed him precisely who it is who is working the typing machine for me."

Later, after she had poured coffee, he indicated the morning paper, "So, it would seem Disraeli has acquired for us the Khedive's shares in the Suez Canal, eh? Tell me, what do you think of that?"

And so he led her into a discussion, which continued until it was time to go to the study and work on his novel.

It wasn't until after dinner that Katherine had some time to herself, to sit in her room and ponder this new development in her life at Masterton Hall. She was convinced that it had something to do with the argument she had heard between Rushton and Rivers the night before. Yet, even if it were only that, Mr. Rushton's attitude, though still formal, had lost its hint of mockery. He no longer seemed such a martinet around her, although she still perceived his rigidity about the others in the house.

She was concluding that the whole change came from a combination of his need for some sort of company—stimulated, no doubt, by his visit to London and the society there—and his argument with Rivers, when Janet knocked on her door.

"Katy," she said, her face flushed. "It's the master. He's asking to see you now—in the drawing room." Her eyes widened as she said the last words.

"The drawing room?" Katherine asked, perplexed. "Are you sure he's not in his study?"

"I'm sure, Kathy. He said, 'Have Miss Sutcliffe come to the drawing room.' His very words."

Katherine thanked her. After patting her hair before the mirror, she gathered her skirts and stepped downstairs.

Lawrence Rushton was standing by the newly lighted fire when she reached the open doors of the drawing room. Rivers was nowhere to be found to announce her, so she took a tentative step inside. "Mr. Rushton? You wished to see me?"

He turned about, a hint of a smile on his lips. "Yes, I do hope I haven't disturbed you, Miss Sutcliffe. Come," he added, indicating the armchair she had sat in the last time, "sit by the fire."

Katherine stepped into the warmth of the room and took her place on the chair. "Is it something about your novel, or about . . . Disraeli?" she ventured, trying to sound light, and at the same time formal.

He laughed his typical short laugh. "No, neither this time. In fact, I forgot about it, but I have brought something back for you from London."

Katherine's eyes widened in surprise. "For me? From London?"

"You seemed, I thought, interested in my pictures of the house and countryside," he went on a bit haltingly. "And I thought perhaps this might match that interest."

He handed her a book.

"I saw this in a bookshop window, and thought . . ." He let his words trail off as Katherine took the gilt-tooled leather volume.

"Thank you very much, Mr. Rushton."

She opened the volume and gasped. It was a book of engravings, hundreds of them it seemed, and each apparently of a Kentish scene. "Beautiful," she murmured.

"I thought so, too. The engravings are from the work of George Shepherd, a fine artist, with a feeling for atmosphere."

Katherine nodded, but didn't respond. She already was eagerly turning page after page. It wasn't until she reached the last one that she found her employer watching her from his own chair. Their eyes met and she stood up hastily, clutching the book to her.

"I'm sorry, I was so enthralled, I quite forgot where I was. I must not take up more of your time. I . . . thank you once again for being so—kind to me."

He appeared, she observed, somewhat taken aback, unsure.

"Was there something else, sir?"

He shrugged. "I had intended showing you—see, I have the map ready—each place in your book." He indicated the table.

Seated now at the table, the map spread before her, Katherine observed he could no longer restrain his smile.

One by one, he indicated the situation of each scene, adding further information to interest her. So absorbed was she that she exclaimed, astonished, when the hall clock struck half past ten, "You must excuse me now, Mr. Rushton—or I shall be unable to work well tomorrow."

He rose with her. "A delightful evening, Miss Sutcliffe," he said, walking her to the door. "I had forgotten how much I have missed a good conversation."

Katherine nodded; she, too, since her arrival at Masterton Hall, had felt the absence of such talk as she had had with Mr. Rushton today.

"Perhaps," he said, when he bade her goodnight, "we shall be able to spend an evening after work in this manner now and again."

Katherine looked up at him. "Yes, Mr. Rushton, I should like that very much."

She retired in an extraordinarily peaceful mood that night, happy that at last her life at Masterton Hall was coming to be as she had originally envisioned it.

It was some time later in the week when, over dinner, Mr. Rushton began speaking about the author Charles Kingsley, a conversation which they pursued over their coffee in the drawing room. Mr. Rushton had been a friend of Kingsley's, Katherine learned, and the latter's death last January had affected him deeply.

Rivers appeared in the doorway and looked briefly astonished to find them there. Mr. Rushton gave orders that one of the maids bring kindling and logs. When the girl arrived he told her to set them in the hearth; he would attend to the fire himself.

Once the fire was crackling to life, he sat back in his armchair across from hers, and finished what he had been saying about Kingsley. "It came as a shock to me, it truly did. He and I were—well, if not close, then of one spirit when it came to the written word.

"But tell me, you mentioned earlier, in the dining room, that you had read most of his books and that they reminded you of Chopin." He raised one of his dark brows. "I found that a curious idea, relating Chopin and Kingsley, I must say."

Katherine laughed. "It has far less to do with each man's art, I'm afraid, than with the fact that I was reading Mr. Kingley's novels at the same time I was learning Chopin's Polonaise."

He sat forward. "Ah, so you play?"

"Yes," she said, lowering her eyes from his intense gaze. "But not very well. An aunt with whom I used to stay taught music, and took some time with me."

"One day, then, you must remind me to show you the music room upstairs. No piano, I'm afraid, but an organ—are you familiar with the organ?"

* * *

Love is an art, and the greatest of the Arts.

Edward Carpenter
The Drama of Love and Death

Katherine confessed she was not.

"No matter," he insisted. "It is simple enough to master if you know the piano. We . . . I . . . had the thing put in several years ago, when—" He suddenly became somber, and then: "But, look at the time. Once again we have talked too far into the night."

Katherine was alarmed to see that the clock read eleven. How ever would she be able to work the typing machine tomorrow? After Rushton had extracted a friendly promise from her to try the organ some day, he bade her goodnight.

It wasn't, however, until a particularly dull and dank Saturday, when she could only stay indoors, that she remembered the organ in the music room. She felt in a mood to play something and, driven more by her mood to perform some music—even on an organ—she broached the subject with him.

He had been rather quiet and thoughtful all day and, she had noticed, terribly short with Janet in the morning; but her suggestion seemed to lift his spirits somewhat. "Of course," he said, answering her request, "a splendid way to spend such a dreary afternoon."

He led her upstairs, along the corridor past her room, and then paused to unlock a door.

Katherine grimaced at the dimness of the room. She looked around at the purple velvet drapery, the sitting chairs, and—against the far wall—the organ.

She hesitated at first, intimidated by the double keyboard. Perhaps, she thought, this wasn't a very good idea, after all; but he had already slid into the long seat and told her to sit beside him.

"It does seem quite difficult an instrument," she said, shyly taking her place.

"Not that much different from a piano," he smiled, and something in that smile signified another time, a nostalgic memory. Soon he was back in control of himself and was showing her how to operate the footpedals. She learned that the upper keyboard was called the Swell, and the lower, the Great.

With his left hand, he traced a simple melody and then, rising, said, "It's your turn now."

Timidly at first, Katherine began with a Chopin piece, playing it twice until she felt she was somewhat acquainted with the cumbersome keyboards and footpedals. Mr. Rushton sat for a while in one of the chairs and listened, advising her now and again. At length, she heard him slip from the room, but so entranced had she become by the mam-moth double keyboard that she remained and played well into the afternoon.

After that, whenever she had free time, Katherine spent it in the music room. She soon found herself waiting for Mr. Rushton to finish a conversation over dinner early, so she could get away and practice.

One evening, she managed to excuse herself early from dinner when he suggested, "Perhaps my talk is keeping you from the organ," and cordially excused her before she had served coffee.

She sat at the organ playing a Bach fugue, when he came into the room.

She stopped, a bit embarrassed by his presence. "I haven't quite mastered this piece," she stammered.

He laughed. "It's quite all right—and besides, sitting in the drawing room I heard you."

She blushed. Of course, the entire house could hear this gigantic sound.

"Perhaps," he suggested, "I can be of some assistance. It is a piece I used to play." Sitting beside her, he took up the left-hand part, and once Katherine had recovered her composure, she joined him.

After they had played it through, he rose. "Please," he said, "do continue playing."

She looked up at him. Something appeared to be on his mind. His brows were furrowed.

"Is there something else, Mr. Rushton, that you wish to discuss? Or to play, perhaps?"

He shook his head and began walking to the door. There he stopped and turned back to her. "Yes, perhaps only to say, Miss Sutcliffe, that I have missed our conversations since your introduction to the organ."

"Oh—I truly have been rude, Mr. Rushton," Katherine exclaimed, jumping to her feet. "And terribly selfish." She was embarrassed for herself. Selfish, indeed. "In fact, I had been meaning to talk with you—" she searched her mind for something to make good her lie—"about your book, the one you gave me when I arrived here." Inwardly she sighed in relief. She had at last finished reading that novel.

He held up his hand, a warm smile spreading over his face. "No, please, do not let me keep you from your playing. Perhaps later this week."

And he was gone.

Katherine was only slightly ashamed as she continued to play. After all, she told herself, an employer cannot demand *all* of one's time. Still, she was beset by an uncomfortable feeling she did not quite understand, never having felt it before in her life.

It was Janet's night off, so she stopped by Simon's room on her way to bed. He slept soundly, looking the picture of innocence in his great, grown-up bed. As she was pulling his door shut she saw Janet running upstairs. She and Janet hadn't spoken for several weeks—each busy with her duties—and she felt a sudden eagerness to spend a few moments with her now.

"Janet," she called softly, making her way in the direction of their rooms. "Do you have a moment?"

Janet, flushed and light-hearted from an evening with George, turned in the doorway as she was about to go to her own room.

"You want to take a leaf out of my book, Katy—find someone of your own class, instead of setting your cap at—"

"Instead of what?" she demanded. "Say that again."

Janet only shook her head. "I'm sorry—it just slipped out, only—"

"Only what?"

"It's all right for *him*. He's master here and can face criticism, but it's *you* who'll be left broken and disappointed when he's had his way with you."

"When he's done what?" Katherine shouted. "You owe me an apology, Janet. I can imagine what insinuations slip back and forth in the kitchen. Let me inform you, they're entirely without foundation. Mr. Rushton's a fine, honorable gentleman—and has never laid a finger on me."

Blinded by tears, Katherine turned, dashing along the landing, almost colliding with her employer.

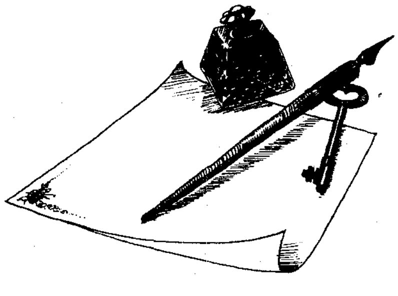
"Miss Sutcliffe!" he exclaimed, trying to detain him, but she evaded him.

"Katherine!" He pursued her as she hastened to her room. Reaching the door, she flew inside, and locked it.

He rapped impatiently. "Will you open this door!"

Katherine covered her face with her hands.

"For the last time—unlock the thing! You will not defy me!" he roared, rattling the door again.



Slowly she turned the key in the lock, then stood with her back turned, as far away as she could get from him.

"Now, what is it?" he asked.

Katherine didn't answer.

"Come and sit down," he suggested.

She ignored him.

Finding a chair, he placed it beside her. "Sit," he commanded.

Trembling, she obeyed, but refused to meet his eyes. He sighed, and pulled another chair next to her.

"Katherine—Miss Sutcliffe—I heard what you said. Why not tell me the whole?It must be obvious I've guessed what Janet has said."

Katherine closed her eyes, shaking her head, fingers pulling at the scrap of cambric handkerchief, and remained quiet.

"They've upset you and it's my fault."

"Of course it isn't," she protested. And then looked at him. His eyes were anguished. "There is nothing wrong."

"Nothing? I find you in tears—defending my name—and you claim that is normal." He sighed. "Since you refuse to reveal the truth, *I* will tell *you*. These servants have chosen to blacken your name as well as mine. And why? Because you, in your kindness, in your concern, your gentleness, took pity on my solitude . . ."

"It wasn't like that, sir. I wanted this talking as we have done, exchanging ideas, just . . . " Lost for words, she halted.

He fell silent, as if reflecting, then rose, going to the door, he hesitated, "Do you want to. . . leave?" he began, haltingly.

"No," Katherine responded quickly.

"Then you must let me handle this my way."

The following Sunday, Katherine was crossing the hall, ready for church, when Mr. Rushton called her.

"Have you a moment? This won't take long."

She stood still, waiting for him to state what he wanted, but he turned aside, beckoning somebody from the drawing room. Janet emerged, face pale and eyes reddened as if from weeping.

Katherine heard him murmur, "Go on then, girl . . ."

Janet came toward her.

"I apologize," she started, before reaching Katherine, "I should not have said what I did—nor even contemplated it . . . " She glanced over her shoulder to their employer, lingering in the doorway. "I have been told now what the position is. I hope you can forgive me and that we'll be friends once more."

"Of course," Katherine responded, kissing the girl's cheek, meeting the brown eyes of the man looking on, and smiling gratefully.

"Are you going to church?" Janet asked. "Master Simon and I would happily accompany you."

Katherine nodded, and Janet called Simon, who rushed from the drawing room. The boy paused, gazing up at Mr. Rushton.

"Will you not come also, Father?"

Katherine bit her lip, observing Mr. Rushton stiffen, then shake his head.

The child's expectant face crumpled. "Sorry, sir." Turning swiftly, he ran from him.

Christmas was nearing, yet Katherine saw no sign of preparations for its celebration. She asked Janet what plans were normally made.

The girl laughed, ruefully. "It's easy to tell you haven't been here long, Katy. The answer's none. We scarcely do anything special."

"What?" She was incredulous.

Janet sighed. "I know—awful, isn't it? A dreary old time we had last year, and no mistake!"

"But . . . Simon! He must have a tree, gifts, and some fun!"

"Oh, Mr. Rushton always buys him something—something expensive, but useful, not toys or frivolities."

"Poor child," Katherine exclaimed. "What has he done to deserve such an existence!"

She resolved at that moment to persuade Mr. Rushton that the time had come for a little gaiety.

The opportunity came the following day.

"What festivities have you in mind, for Christmas?" she inquired, as he stood beside her as she practiced the organ.

She felt eyes boring into her. "None—why?" he asked coldly.

"Well, it is a time for rejoicing—and with a child in the house . . . "

Katherine heard his sharp breath. His tone was imperious, "Miss Sutcliffe," but she wouldn't look at him. He continued, nevertheless: "If the prospect of Christmas in my miserable household so alarms you, we must arrange that you return to your native Yorkshire." The door closed behind him.

Apprehensively, Katherine moved to the fire.

Away in the copse, an owl hooted. Katherine jumped, shivered, drew closer to the fire. This was one of the few rooms in the entire mansion where she felt at ease—was that significant? Was the melancholy air of Masterton Hall reflected from its owner? Had she been lulled by their dinners and conversations into overlooking the atmosphere of the place?

The exquisite furnishings did little to relieve the eeriness of this lovely old house, where the servants went about in ominous near-silence, and the master thwarted most attempts to alleviate its gloom.

For two whole wearisome days Mr. Rushton spoke to Katherine only when compelled. Because of this, she avoided him after dinner, retiring instead to her own room.

On the third morning she was first in the study, although dreading the renewal of his morose company and already wishing the time away.

He entered, sat facing her at his desk, then tossed across several gold sovereigns.

Bewildered, Katherine frowned. "What's this for?"

"You seem set on turning the place into some sort of pleasure palace. Take Janet and go into Maidstone. George has orders to put the carriage at your disposal. Buy what you deem necessary to transform the nursery—even the servants' quarters."

She gasped delightedly, feeling the weight lifted. "You dear man. I knew you didn't intend remaining so solemn and severe. It really isn't like you."

He seemed taken aback.

"We have work to do. I trust you are satisfied!" he said.

Eager to please, she rattled away at the keys until he stopped dictating.

During dinner that evening, she ventured a further suggestion.

"Would you object if, when Janet and I go shopping, we took Master Simon with us? He'd love to see all the shop windows, brightly decorated . . . "

He snorted, then smiled wryly. "Do as you please. You seem determined to have your way. I'm sure you'll only find the boy a nuisance."

* * *

The course of true love never did
run smooth.

William Shakespeare
A Midsummer Night's Dream

The next day, it was an excited Simon who clambered onto the carriage seat to chatter the journey away. It was the first time he recalled riding in his father's brougham, so that alone was a treat.

When they arrived in Maidstone, however, and the boy spied the shops decked out for Christmas, he shouted gleefully, attracting the attention of passers-by.

They chose a Christmas tree, then glass ornaments and tinsel, before thinking of presents. Katherine, sure that George and Janet wished some time alone, took Simon with her, arranging a meeting place for the homeward journey.

Katherine enjoyed seeing things through Simon's eyes, and didn't protest when he constantly delayed her, exclaiming over some novelty. In one shop he stopped to admire a miniature farmyard.

"Look, Katy, just like in our story."

On impulse, she turned his attention away to a musical box, requesting the shopkeeper to pack the farmyard. She would insure that this year he had at least one gift he would enjoy.

Completing a tour of the shops, Katherine watched Simon eyeing rows of glazed cakes in a confectioner's window, and so decided to visit a tearoom. This he declared great fun; they emerged, well pleased.

Further along the street, Katherine paused, passing a jeweler's, attracted by a silver tiepin. Small and neat, she knew suddenly it was suited to Mr. Rushton. Quickly, she checked her purse's contents; just enough remained from her last wages, providing she budgeted carefully.

Later, re-examining the tiepin in its velvet nest, she felt the glow of knowing she had done the right—the only—thing. Now she longed for Christmas, and Mr. Rushton's surprise on opening the gift.

On the following Saturday, Janet and Katherine took Simon through the park in the crisp December air. Walking back they stopped in the copse to gather holly and mistletoe to add to their decorations.

Mr. Rushton had relented further, allowing the giant tree a place on the landing. It stood resplendent, above the hall.

Katherine, while trimming it, smiled to herself. Slowly but surely, Mr. Rushton seemed to be accepting the fact that Christmas was nearing, and that something must be done to mark the festival.

On the day preceding Christmas Eve, Katherine emerged from her room to find Rivers standing beside the landing balustrade, gazing up at the tree.

"One of the ornaments has fallen off the top," he said with an odd expression that might have been a smile. Beside him was a stepladder. "Perhaps, as this is your project, you would like to replace it in its proper place," he added stiffly.

"Of course. Give it to me . . . "

Taking the bauble, she mounted the stepladder.

At the top, as she stretched out a hand to set the decoration in place, Katherine heard the wood cracking and splitting beneath her, and felt herself falling. She thought in horror of the enormous well of the staircase, of the steps—stone beneath the carpeting—convinced she was hurtling to her death. But her back caught the balustrade, then her head struck it, and she fell with a thud on the landing.

Katherine bit her lip, striving not to lose consciousness, and was astonished to see Mrs. Hawkins bending over her with Rivers. Suddenly she was terrified, more so than on feeling the ladder give way under her; but she managed to keep her senses, although only vaguely aware of what was going on around her. Doors were flying open, as occupants of the various rooms hurried to investigate. Simon came racing along from the nursery, with Janet closely following.

"It's Katy—she's hurt . . . " she heard the boy scream.

At that another door opened and she heard more feet speeding toward her.

"All right—stand aside, let me get to her," commanded the voice accustomed to giving orders.

"I can stand by myself, if you just let me rest here for a second," Katherine started to protest, as Mr. Rushton knelt beside her.

"Can you move your legs?" he asked, ignoring her protest.

Katherine nodded, wincing at the sharp pain from her back when she tried to do so. Without a word, he gathered her up in his arms.

"Don't stand staring like a pack of idiots," he shouted over his shoulder. "Send George for the doctor."

He carried her to his own room, kicking open the door, before laying her gently on the exquisite counterpane.

Katherine alternated between consciousness and unconsciousness until Dr. McLaren arrived. After he had pronounced her bruised and badly shaken, but with no serious injury, he helped Mr. Rushton carry her to her own room.

There she stayed, sleeping with the aid of the laudanum, which the doctor had left, for the rest of the day.

During the day of Christmas Eve, she stayed in her room. A steely-faced Mrs. Hawkins served her meals, and each time the woman appeared, Katherine was filled with a dread foreboding. It seemed as though the housekeeper was disappointed that she was recovering from the fall.

Simon and Janet came to visit her several times during the day, bringing her the pictures and clay sculptures Simon had made for her as gifts.

But it wasn't until Lawrence Rushton came to visit her that she felt overwhelmed by an alien sensation. At first she attributed it to her injury but, after their brief conversation and as he was bidding her good evening, she realized it was on account of something else—something she had not known before in her life.

She banished the thoughts from her mind, telling herself that the laudanum was working its strange effects on her still.

But the following morning, Christmas, Katherine awakened in bright spirits, feeling far less pain than she had the day before. Determined to take part in the festivities, she limped from her bed into the bath, where she was surprised to see that someone—perhaps Mrs. Hawkins—had drawn a tub of hot water.

After a leisurely bath, she made her way downstairs with the small parcel which was her gift for Mr. Rushton.

She was, as she had anticipated she would be, in the dining room before he had arrived. She placed the tiny parcel near his napkin, then took her seat across from his.

A moment later he arrived, his raised eyebrows telling her he was surprised to see her. "So you are feeling more yourself," he said.

She nodded. "Thanks to you and Janet, and Master Simon," she replied, as he moved around the long table to take his seat. She held her breath until he saw the gift.

"And what is this?" he asked, picking up the brightly wrapped parcel and nodding toward her.

Katherine felt the color rise in her cheeks. "Christmas," she said. "Something for the holiday."

He smiled, setting the package on the table and rising.

Stepping to the sideboard, he picked up a red and white parcel and handed it to her. "And for you," he said, with a formal smile, then returned to his place.

Katherine was so taken aback she could not speak, and in silence they unwrapped their gifts.

It was Mr. Rushton who spoke first. "Katherine—ah, Miss Sutcliffe—you seem to have found a most perfect accessory for my wardrobe." He smiled. "And how did you know that I was in need of a tiepin?"

But Katherine was too astonished at what had lain beneath the lovely gift wrapping that he had handed her: a delicately patterned green silk scarf, the same shade as her eyes. Not only was she taken by Mr. Rushton's sense of perfection with the exquisite scarf, but by his embrace of the holiday spirit in giving a gift.

"I . . . I think this is the most lovely scarf I have ever seen," she stammered.

"Thank you," he said softly. "And thank you for this." He fastened the pin to his ascot.

"And Merry Christmas to you," Katherine added.

"To one and all," he said, his voice formal and forced.

Katherine watched him during breakfast. His face seemed more relaxed, less stern, and his conversation was light, almost jovial.

Yet later, when she had accepted his invitation to join him before the fire in the drawing room, he returned to a more characteristic silence. When Janet rapped on the door, intent on having Katherine join the special Christmas nursery tea, he displayed his downturned brows, but said, "Of course. That is where you should be at this time on Christmas Day."

Katherine insisted that he come along, and after some reluctance, he did so.

The pleasures of nursery tea did not come readily to Lawrence Rushton. He sat uneasily, toying with a slice of cake, carefully avoiding Simon's adoring gaze.

He took no part in the childish games which followed, in which Katherine joined enthusiastically, biting her lips against the pain which shot intermittently through her.

Glancing across the nursery after almost an hour, she noticed a great sadness in Mr. Rushton's eyes. Moments later she heard the door open as he slipped away.

Later, after Master Simon was ready for an early afternoon nap, Katherine slipped up to the music room. She sat at the organ and began to play some of the simple carols she recalled from her own childhood, all the while musing on the odd feeling she had sensed all day. She had just decided to attribute it all to the holiday spirit when the door swung open and Mr. Rushton entered. Once again, her heart beat twice as fast as usual. Still, she kept to the keyboards, pausing only to ask, "Do you know this one, Mr. Rushton? It's based on Purcell."

To her shock, his hand came down on the keyboard, producing a harsh discord on the instrument. "Yes," he said at length, "I know it. I know them all."

Suddenly, Katherine felt her entire being fill with something very close to total rage. "Sir," she said, turning to face him, "I find you impossible to understand. This morning you were so—so Christmaslike. And now you are acting precisely like Mr. Dickens' character—that . . . oh, who is it?" Her anger having taken her memory, Katherine could merely glare up at him. His frown turned to a grin at her expression.

"Scrooge?" he said.

"Oh,Mr. Rushton," she exclaimed.

"So, you've read Mr. Dickens' stories, too?" he said, then laughed. "You are a pip."

Aghast, Katherine could only retort, "You, sir, are the Pip here." But his hand was already back on the keyboard, and he was slipping into the space alongside her on the seat.

"That carol based on Purcell," he said, laughter in his voice, "shall we play it—together?"

She glanced at him, and saw an odd light in his eyes.

They played the piece through, then went into another, and before she knew it, the afternoon was gone.

Turning from the organ, finally, she began, "Why do you treat Simon as some stranger—and an utter nuisance?"

Immediately, his good humor evaporated. He studied her minutely, then sighed. "Can you begin to understand that all I see when I look at the child is a reminder of things I prefer to forget? Can't you see that even I can be hurt by remembering . . . ?"

"I'm sorry," she murmured.

"For Simon." It wasn't a question.

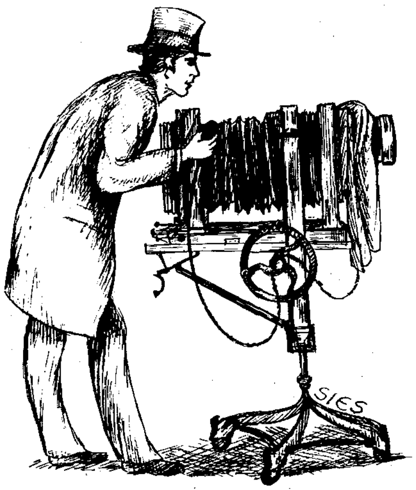
"For both of you."

Next morning Mr. Rushton seemed unusually light-hearted. Katherine hoped this was partly due to what had been said on Christmas Day. For she herself was far happier than previously. In his admission that Simon resurrected unhappy memories, Lawrence Rushton had provided an acceptable explanation for his attitude.

She was once again pleasantly surprised when, after breakfast, he suggested a stroll through the park. "If you are sufficiently recovered from your accident . . . " She nodded, smiling, and was offered his arm.

They headed along the terrace, past the ruined east wing. Tempted to ask how the interior had been destroyed, Katherine recalled the criticism of her perpetual questioning, and remained silent.

From the terrace they went toward the rear, which she had not yet explored. As they walked, he related how the house had been restored by his great-grandfather. He paused occasionally, indicating carved family crests above doors, as well as details of the reconstruction, satisfying her earlier curiosity about the differences in style. Passing the kitchens they came to the stables.



"Come and see," he invited. He paused to pat the chestnut mare she'd seen him riding, then asked if she had ever ridden.

Katherine laughed. "You wouldn't think so—it was atop a great shire horse!"

Mr. Rushton smiled. "Perhaps that, too, is something I should teach you?"

"You ride often, don't you?"

"Used to—when I was alone here."

He strode toward the filly and rubbed the animal's nose affectionately. "Midnight doesn't get sufficient exercise—I'm too heavy for her, but you and she would get along admirably together."

"Surely someone rides her?"

"One of the stable boys who comes in daily from the village."

"If that's all, why did you get her?"

Mr. Rushton chuckled. "There you have me—simply because I imagined Reveller over yonder might feel lonely." He noticed Katherine's astonishment and laughed. "I know what you're thinking! I do have infinite consideration—for horses. Won't you, though, insure none of us endure loneliness? Get that back of yours well, then ride with me."

"Thank you, I'd love to."

Leaving the stables, they skirted the west side of the house, and Mr. Rushton pointed out a row of windows on the first floor. "The ballroom . . . "

"I didn't know there was one."

He shrugged. "It hasn't been used for years."

"Why not—?" she began, then his frown stopped her.

But his smile returned. "For the first time in long enough, I'm taking an interest in the place."

Something in the tone of his voice made her stop and look up at him keenly. Then, without a word, his hand found hers, and, without knowing quite what she was doing, she moved into his embrace. In another moment, his lips were on hers, soft and tender.

"Katherine," he whispered, "how I've longed for someone like you to enter my life."

Katherine could barely control her trembling, and leaned heavily against him.

"Mr. Rushton, I . . . I've never—"

"Please," he chuckled, sliding his hand to her shoulder, "isn't it time to call me Lawrence?"

It came to her lips with difficulty, but finally, she breathed, "Lawrence."

"Katherine," he said again, "do you know I love you?"

She did know, somehow had known for some time. At last she understood what the odd feeling she had felt whenever she was in his company meant. She—Katherine Sutcliffe—was in love.

But in the next moment, she was ablaze with conflict. How could she have fallen in love with him? He, a married man, a man with so many secrets that he was being blackmailed? What of *Mrs.* Rushton?

Horrified at what had passed between them, Katherine sprung from his arms, pulled away forcefully when he tried to stop her, and ran, tears blinding her, to the house. "Katherine!"

But she had already tugged the heavy door open and was running upstairs. In her room, she flung herself on her bed, in tears. Tomorrow, she vowed, first thing tomorrow, she would pack, ask George to take her to the station, and leave for Yorkshire. Even a life in service was preferable to falling in love with a married man.

She was thus wrestling with her thoughts when his gentle rapping sounded on her door. Reluctantly, she let him in.

"I know what you are thinking," he said at length, having settled in one of her armchairs. "You are thinking that you should leave Masterton Hall." He hesitated, held up his hand to stay the protest on her lips. "But let me say this, Katherine, I need you. That is first. Second, I am leaving for London again tomorrow. While I am away, I wish you would counsel yourself on your true feelings. And then, when I return—"

Now, she did interrupt. "But you do not understand, Mr. Rush—Lawrence," she cried, then lowered her voice. "It is simply that I cannot fall in love with a man who is . . . who is already married." There. She had said it.

An odd light flickered in his eyes. His lips turned down and his brow furrowed. Something between anger and sorrow crossed his face before he said, softly, "One day I will explain it all to you, Katherine. But for now, let me tell you this—I am a widower."

A long, tense silence fell between them before Katherine murmured, "Your wife—died?"

He didn't answer, but rose from his chair. At the door, he turned. "I will see you when I return," he whispered. Then he was gone.

Confused and distraught, Katherine stayed in her room the rest of the day. To her surprise, the cold Mrs. Hawkins knocked on her door at dinnertime with a tray. "The master says you're still feeling ill," she snorted as she slid the dinner tray onto the bedtable.

Katherine muttered her thanks as the woman huffed from the room, then ate a lonely dinner.

When she arrived in his study the next morning, he had already left for London. On his desk were his painstakingly written pages with a note asking her to transcribe them with the typewriter.

But she felt so lethargic, so drained of everything, that even typing his beautiful words failed to excite her.

She scowled at his left-handed scrawls, and tears pricked her eyes. What must it be like—having to learn to use one's left hand? Idly, she picked up a pen and a scrap of paper. Laboriously, she wrote, tongue between her teeth, *Katherine Sutcliffe*. Even she herself could hardly read it. Yet Lawrence had persevered, making one hand serve as two. How had he done it? Again, she tried, and a third time, each effort only a fraction more legible than the last. She covered the sheet of paper with this unfamiliar signature, then turned it over. Bored with her own name, she wrote *Masterton Hall,* then *Lawrence Rushton;* over and over again, until her fingers ached with discomfort.

Katherine started, guiltily, when the study door opened after a brief knock. She pushed the piece of paper beneath others, glancing toward Mrs. Hawkins, who had entered.

"I was just wondering if you'd prefer luncheon in your room, Miss Sutcliffe, with the master away."

"Very well, Mrs. Hawkins, if that's more convenient."

"Oh, it wasn't that, Miss. I thought maybe you'd find the dining room a mite lonely."

Katherine smiled. "If that is the only reason, I will keep the arrangements as they are."

"As you wish." But Mrs. Hawkins didn't go; she wandered 'round the study, as though she had something on her mind.

"Was there anything else?" Katherine demanded.

"Mr. Rushton visits London frequently, doesn't he?"

"Does he?" Katherine responded coldly. "I really couldn't say—this is only the second occasion since I came to work here."

"It's only to be expected, isn't it? We know what men are. And Mr. Rushton must miss the joys of a happy marriage. Who can blame him for going off—they tell me there are plenty of such women in London."

Katherine took a deep breath, trying to check the color rushing to her cheeks. How dare Mrs. Hawkins come in here to discuss Lawrence Rushton in this manner! Katherine looked to the door, pointedly, but the other woman had already anticipated that, and opened it. She knew when to make her exit.

Although she recognized that all Mrs. Hawkins had said was mere conjecture, calculated to make her uneasy, Katherine found herself unable to dismiss it. Was that—could that be Lawrence's reason for going there?

"No, no, no!" something inside her cried, "I must not believe that."

The next few days were, nevertheless, trying. Mrs. Hawkins had succeeded in sowing doubt and scarcely an hour passed without Katherine wondering what Lawrence was about in London. Where he was—and with whom? And she missed him more than she'd imagined possible.

As day succeeded day, her thoughts became more confused. Half-believing the housekeeper's explanation, she found it hard to imagine being relaxed with Lawrence in the future.

Just as she was losing all confidence in him, Katherine received his letter. Brief, hardly more than a note, it allayed her fears. He had, she learned, spent a deal of time with his publishers and had had other business needing attention. Now all was nearing completion and he looked forward to returning in time for dinner the following evening.

Throughout the next day Katherine lived in happy anticipation of his homecoming. She dressed carefully for dinner, choosing an amber colored gown which he had previously admired.

Satin, it was: admittedly, dressy for a simple meal at home, but she wanted to wear something special. She brushed her chestnut hair, parting it in the center, then spent considerable time sweeping it up and back over her ears. allowing circling tendrils to fall loose around her face, softly framing it. The hall clock chimed, reminding her she would be late for the meal. Hastily extinguishing the gas light, she ran lightly downstairs to the dining room. Her welcoming smile died on her lips—the room was empty. She told herself Lawrence had probably come in only seconds ago and was changing. But she had heard no sound from that room next to hers. Had he not yet returned from London?

Half an hour later Rivers appeared and silently set Katherine's soup before her.

"It seems Mr. Rushton is delayed," she began.

"Apparently," Rivers replied shortly, and left the room without another word.

There was still no sign of Lawrence when Katherine had finished eating. She remained in the dining room, thinking to keep him company. Presently, however, the servant came to clear away so Katherine went toward the drawing room. She couldn't settle to the book that she'd been reading; impatiently, she crossed the hall to the study. She would find one of Lawrence's books, surely that would occupy her. Taking one of his novels from the shelf, she retraced her steps to the drawing room.

And still he didn't come, and now she was growing anxious. Supposing something had befallen him as he traveled from Maidstone station? Only a week ago a brougham had overturned when its wheels hit a patch of ice and the horse, frightened, had bolted.

Unable to sit still, Katherine went to the music room. Here she felt close to Lawrence, even when he was away. She ran her fingers over the keys of the organ, but didn't sit down. She stoked the log fire, showering sparks on to the hearth.

At eleven, though, she was alone still—sitting in the firelight, trying to suppress her childlike disappointment.

Startled by knocking on the door, Katherine found Rivers there, carrying a candle. "The master has sent me to fetch you."

She frowned, puzzled; she'd not heard the front door, nor Lawrence's step in the hall. "But surely he's still . . ." she started, but Rivers interrupted, meeting her eyes unflinchingly.

"How could he ask for you, if he'd not returned? This way. . . "

Katherine rose and followed. Rivers astonished her by going along the corridor and unlocking the gallery door. His candle flickered over the pictures.

"There's no one here," she protested, but was pushed inside.

Locking the door, Rivers seized her, marching her along the echoing gallery. "Come along, he's in here . . ." He was dragging her toward the room which wasn't a room.

Katherine took a deep breath, searching through confusion for anything that might save her. Because Rivers intended her destruction. The man's viselike grip told her any struggle would end with her hurtling into space.

Then she realized Rivers wasn't aware she knew about that room; she would play on that—her only hope. He was hustling her relentlessly toward what seemed inevitable.

They reached the door. Rivers jerked back its curtain, turned the handle.

"Just step inside, Miss . . ." He extinguished the candle.

And he loosed his hold on her. Those were his mistakes; in darkness he, too, could see nothing. He would only sense that she hadn't gone through that door. Other than that, she could be anywhere. She lunged at him, caught him off guard, and heard him fall. But he was up again, instantly; she heard rapid breathing as he advanced on her. He snatched at her skirts, pulling her to the floor, struggling to get his fingers on her throat. Katherine scratched at him, trying to reach his eyes, but a heavy hand came smacking into her face, stinging tears to her eyes.

As they struggled, she realized what he was doing. Inch by inch he was edging her toward that open door. She felt for it with her feet, meaning to kick it closed. Only Rivers, reacting faster, kicked it first—forcing it wide open.

Katherine felt the cold blast of night air whistling through from the ruins. Rivers gave a great heave, and turned her over. She was facing the door now, could see in the light reflecting off the snow how near it was. And Rivers's malevolent expression as he bent over her. He caught her flowing hair, rising, dragging her to her feet by her tresses. His other hand clamped iron-hard on her wrist.

Her teeth found the back of his hand. Rivers gave a screaming oath as she bit, then let go her wrist, freed her hair.

He put the wounded hand to his mouth; they eyed each other, warily. Both glanced around. Simultaneously, they saw the cutlass, gleaming in the half-light, on the wall. Rivers sprang for it, and advanced, slowly. Katherine knew she could no longer fight him. The other door locked, she had but one escape. She backed steadily toward the ruins.

With a satisfied smile, Rivers lowered the cutlass but trod resolutely on at her. He was only inches away, he could have touched her—but he didn't. He put a hand to the edge of the heavy oak door, eyeing her unflinchingly as she withdrew further from him.

Praying there was but a slight ledge—some three inches would suffice—within that shell of a room, Katherine kept on retreating.

Now the door was being closed on her—within seconds it could force her into the abyss. She leaned all her weight against it, intent on preventing it from closing. She felt resistance, as Rivers pushed from the other side. And he was on firm floorboards—her heels were in space now. Soon she would be falling—with nothing to stop her.

Katherine grasped the door frame, to use it as leverage. Loose, the huge block of wood fell away. Involuntarily, she screamed when it crashed to the stone floor—as she might have crashed. She felt an easing of the pressure on the door. At once, she understood—Rivers believed she'd fallen. She must make no sound, give no sign that it wasn't so. This demanded complete stillness; she must find something to help steady her. Quickly, she glanced to left and right in the eerie white light. If there was some foothold, somewhere to cling until Rivers had gone . . .

The door frame had left a cavity, maybe six inches across, and an inch deeper. Taller than Katherine herself, it presented the only possibility. Here and there enormous iron nails, originally securing the wood, protruded from the masonry. Could she hang on to them?

She inserted her right toe into the cavity, and gripped one of the nails, after testing its strength. Then, forcing herself to keep balance, she swung her weight across, bringing her left foot to join the other. Inwardly, she sighed, relieved; now she need only wait . . .

As if in derision, the door clicked shut; she heard the key turn in the lock.

Katherine shuddered. What use the

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All mankind love a lover.

Ralph Waldo Emerson
Love

struggle, why trouble to fight him? All was lost now. She was locked out here, to cling, like a limpet to a sea wall, until numbed fingers relaxed their grip, and dizziness stole her stability.

Katherine closed her eyes against the nausea threatening to overwhelm her, only to open them, startled, as a bat wheeled past her head. She stifled a scream.

Cautiously, she looked to the right and noticed a wooden joist, almost a foot thick, crossing toward what was left of a dividing wall. The wall, partially crumbled, had once supported a wooden staircase. Katherine noted, joyfully, the upper flight of stairs still remained. Wriggling one foot free of her skirts, Katherine bent down, gingerly, clinging to those protruding nails til she was kneeling on the joist. It took her weight.

Slowly, she began to crawl along the cobwebby beam, forcing herself to look ahead instead of down. Splinters ran into her hands and legs, but eventually she reached the other side, and knelt there, peering round her. She was panting and paused to regain her breath, then swung her left leg over the beam. Hands locked together round it, she dangled into space, feeling with her feet for the rickety steps. They were out of reach.

Clenching her teeth, she gradually eased herself down until she hung by her fingertips. First one foot touched the top step, then the other. Trembling, she clutched at the wall, waiting for the shuddering to stop.

She descended the steps warily, testing each in turn, until she grew more confident that they would support her and began to believe there would be an escape.

Suddenly the stairs swung away from the wall. Timber creaking and splintering all around her, unable to grasp anything to save herself. Katherine plunged down.

In a sickening wave of pain before losing consciousness, Katherine pictured Rivers's triumph when she was discovered dead in the morning. She had no doubt that this would be her fate.

Strong arms were carrying her; she was laid gently on cushions. She moaned, moving her head from side to side, and the arm holding her against the cushions tightened. A cool hand touched her forehead. Katherine stiffened, remembering. So she had been found, before it was too late. She dared not open her eyes. Rivers?

"Kate . . . "

Unbelievingly, she raised her lashes. "Lawrence . . . "

He nodded, pressing his lips to her hand. "Thank God we found you. We were delayed on the road because this horse of ours lost a shoe and we had to find a blacksmith. It was George who saw you—heaven be praised for his keen eyes. You wouldn't have lasted the night exposed to these elements."

Looking beyond him, when he eventually moved away a little, she discovered they were in Lawrence's carriage. He was half-kneeling on the floor, holding her on to the seat, steadying her against its rocking.

"We're taking you round to the front," he explained. "I'll soon get you to your room."

When they reached the door, he swung her into his arms again, and carried her to her room.

Lawrence remained with her until Dr. McLaren arrived to examine her and dress her wounds. And when Janet had helped wash and undress her and Katherine lay, aching and sore still, but in clean linen, he returned.

"Another accident, Katherine?" he asked, when Janet had gone.

She shook her head. "No—and I don't believe the other incident was, either. . . " He didn't appear surprised; perhaps he also had been suspicious.

He sighed, occupying the chair beside the bed. "You must try to sleep now, Kate. You can tell me all about it in the morning."

"But. . .Rivers," she began.

"Sleep, my love," Lawrence insisted, "or you'll be ill."

"But you've got to be careful as well, Lawrence—Rivers is dangerous. . . "

A smile played round his lips for a second. "I shall be close by and the door's locked. I will ensure that you come to no further harm."

When Katherine awoke, daylight streamed in through the windows. It looked to be midday. But she hadn't been awakened by the noontime sun; rather, by the voices outside her door.

She heard Mrs. Hawkins's voice as well as Lawrence's.

He was frowning when he entered the room.

"Rivers has vanished."

"Vanished? But that's worse—he could be anywhere, in hiding, watching. . . "

"I think not—I've a shrewd idea where he's gone."

"Where then? Lawrence, what is going on here?"

Momentarily, she thought he would tell her; but he shook his head.

"No. I'll fight this my way. Maybe, when it's all over—if you want to come back. . . "

"Come back? You can't mean it, you wouldn't send me away." She was sobbing now.

He sighed and made for the door. "I'll find Janet for you. We'll discuss this rationally, after breakfast."

By the time Lawrence returned, Katherine's decision was made. "You can say what you will, Lawrence, I am not leaving."

"Oh, Kate—why persist so? Can't you just go away, to your parents, anywhere, so I know no injury can befall you?"

She shook her head, biting her lip, but her eyes met his with a new brilliance.

He hesitated. "We could have this lock changed . . . but the fact remains you know nothing of the dangers."

"Won't you tell me, even now?"

Lawrence shook his head and looked away.

Katherine touched his hand. "Let me stay, Lawrence . . . "

He closed his eyes. "I cannot . . . make . . . make you go," he admitted, falteringly, as though despising himself.

Steadily, with the passing days, Katherine recovered from her terrifying ordeal; although her back was often painful, as soon as her fingers healed she returned to her desk.

When Lawrence next had business in London he took Katherine with him, reserving her a room at a hotel near his club. In the morning she accompanied him to his publishers. Mr. MacAndrews, head of the firm, professed delight on meeting someone skilled with one of the new typing machines.

Afterward, learning this was Katherine's first visit to London, Lawrence took it upon himself to make sure that she missed little. Their hansom cab took them first to Westminster, then to St. Paul's and then to the Tower. Katherine soon discovered Lawrence's knowledge of the capital was by no means small. She'd always found him an interesting companion; now she realized she had only half known him, had only half appreciated his talent for arousing curiosity about one's surroundings.

Indeed, when he was telling her they would attend a performance by the famed Henry Irving, she scarcely had a chance to thank him before pointing to the enormous Gothic building they approached. "Later, I'd love to hear about the theater, but now I simply want to see everything. Do tell me, is that Westminister Abbey?"

Outside, again, they admired Barry's design of the Houses of Parliament, completed a decade ago. At St. Paul's Lawrence told her not simply of the various churches preceding Christopher Wren's building, but of the legend attributing the site with a temple to the goddess Diana. Katherine marveled; seeing, through his eyes, all the people —over many centuries—who had worshipped there.

The interest continued at the Tower, when she learned its history, reaching back past its Norman origins to suspected Roman connections. Katherine smiled and nodded toward one of the guardsmen stationed there. "Do you suppose he appreciates just how privileged he is to live here?"

Lawrence laughed. "I didn't think you'd be so enthusiastic about a lot of buildings!"

"Only because you make it come alive."

He gave a mock bow. "Anything to please you!" But a quick glance told her he was delighted to be showing her that all these places were nothing like so dull as some imagined.

By the following morning, however, his happiness seemed to have faded. He was preoccupied when he arrived to collect her after breakfast. She asked if something was worrying him, and he shrugged.

"I have an appointment with a solicitor. All will be well when that is over."

Waiting in the gloomy outer office, in Chancery Lane, Katherine wondered what had brought Lawrence there. Was he in trouble—something too dreadful to discuss with her?

When Lawrence emerged, he was more cheerful, and Katherine gave herself to comtemplating the scene from the hired carriage, traveling toward Buckingham Palace. Once there, however, despite the reconstruction to the design of John Nash, Katherine was disappointed in its appearance, and said so.

Lawrence laughed. "Perhaps that is why our Queen, since Prince Albert's death, prefers residing at Osborne House."

"Maybe that's more comfortable, more of a real home—something like Masterton Hall. . . "

That evening Lawrence took her to the theater, and afterward for dinner—though Katherine declared herself too thrilled by Henry Irving's acting to eat.

During the meal, Lawrence raised his glass to her. "You've brought me so much happiness, Katherine. . . "

"And worries!"

He shook his head. "They're not here—not tonight."

He paused momentarily. "I remember how you came to me, how you persisted—putting up with my evil disposition, until you made your place—peace with me."

◆

Earth's the right place for love:
I don't know where it's likely to go better

Robert Frost
Birches

◆

She forced a smile. "And you, Lawrence, have become . . . my dearest friend."

Appearing pensive, Lawrence was staring into the street. He sprang up suddenly and stood between her and the window, shielding her.

"Lawrence—what is it?"

His face was ashen. "Rivers! Here, of all places. He's passed now. But we must hurry. Pack, leave London. . . "

It was too late to leave London that night; and Lawrence was uneasy until George met them in Maidstone the next day with the carriage.

He gave a long sigh, then smiled. "Safe now. Soon we'll be at Masterton."

For almost a month Katherine was supremely happy. Their visit to London appeared to have deepened their understanding. And the fact that Lawrence had taken her had vanquished all Mrs. Hawkins's insinuations about his reasons for going to the capital. Lawrence was attentive, whenever they were alone together, concerned for her welfare. She told herself this was all she needed—the knowledge that he cared for her. As time went on, however, her alert mind started questioning his behavior.

Watching, noting and caring about Lawrence, she was disturbed to uncover much that was inexplicable. Repeatedly, she saw him start at some sudden noise or glance uneasily over his shoulder. Yet he denied this, even to her, was adamantly opposed to her suggestion to alert the police to watch for Rivers. He seemed determined to ignore normal methods of warding off criminal attacks. And what was more incriminating than attempted murder?

Her safety appeared now to be his only concern. He gave no sign of a need to express his feelings. The passing weeks since their return decreased the times he raised her hand to his lips. And rarely did his eyes hold hers lingeringly. It was as if those tender moments had never been.

Katherine wondered sometimes if Lawrence regretted his affection. Had it been an expression of pity even, on finding her thus bruised and bleeding?

Confused, oppressed by doubts, and irked by his insistence that she should not venture outside alone, Katherine finally approached him, insisting she needed to go into town to shop for some new dress fabric.

Several weeks having passed since Rivers' attempt on her life, without any sign of his return, Lawrence relaxed his diligence. He appeared, indeed, more than content to let her go alone, saying he had matters requiring his immediate attention.

Katherine was puzzled at first, wondering what these matters were.

She dismissed her momentary disquiet, however, as soon as she began exploring the shops. Happily, she compared one fabric with another, then made a final selection of materials and sought trimmings for them.

Glancing at her watch, her purchases completed, Katherine found she had some fifteen minutes before she was to meet George at the coaching inn. She wandered from one shop window to the next, looking at their wares, interested, but her attention not completely held.

Then her attention was caught forcibly, bringing a pounding to her pulses, by a familiar figure. Despite the intervening crowds of the street market, she knew at once the set of the head, the swing of the stride. It could be no other.

What had prevented his mentioning

that his business also was here? Surely he would have preferred that they journey together? And how had he got here—by hired carriage?

She would cross to Lawrence now—and watch the smile come into those dark eyes at the prospect of her company.

Momentarily, people moving between the market stalls in the twilight concealed him, then she glimpsed him again. Horrified, Katherine saw his companion. A woman, about her own age, fair curls springing from beneath a feathered hat. She gasped; his arm went to the woman's waist as they mounted the steps of a fashionable restaurant.

Katherine pressed her knuckles to her mouth. She would not weep, here in the street, for all to see. Lawrence's bold, flouting indiscretion made her even more determined to show no emotion.

Nothing, though, could quiet her rapid heart, nor the startled sobs that were her breathing. She leaned against a shop doorway. Her distress must have been apparent, a kindly elderly soul paused to inquire if she were unwell.

Katherine shook her head. "A little breathless, that is all—it will pass." She thanked the woman and watched her go on her way—wishing that she too were old and finished with love's vulnerability.

And now what should she do? Enter that restaurant and confront Lawrence and his companion? She could not trust herself to do so calmly. Instead, she would return to the house, demand an explanation on his return.

George discovered her thus, agitated and heedless of the time, when he started searching, because of her absence from their pre-arranged meeting place. He stared anxiously at her worried expression, assisting her into the carriage. She was thankful to escape his curious eyes by withdrawing into the obscurity of the brougham.

All Katherine could see was Lawrence's arm about that woman—and her fair curls, so like the ones in that portrait. She was unable to weep, even in the privacy of the carriage; the hurt was deeper than tears. She felt numb, and sick with revulsion.

There had been, too, the look George gave her. It had seemed pitying; as if he knew how torn she was. And pity she would not endure. No one must learn of this—except Lawrence himself at the appropriate moment. She would not reveal to Janet, or anyone else, how bitterly she had been humiliated.

When George helped her alight at the front steps, she thanked him composedly, then asked him to convey her excuses for absence from the dinner table. Pleading a headache, she rushed to her room.

In the sanctuary of her own room, she found the tears which had refused to come earlier. They poured down her cheeks as, without removing cloak or hat, she sat at the dressing table, her face buried in her hands.

By morning, the sleepless hours presenting more than sufficient time for re-examining the situation, Katherine had decided against speaking to Lawrence of the matter. He knew where he had been—and with whom. If conscience didn't tell him anything to explain her changed attitude, nothing would.

Over breakfast, he appeared solicitous. "I see from your face that you are far from well. You must know, Kate, that I don't expect you to work if you are not recovered."

She shook her head impatiently. "There is no need for concern. I'm perfectly able to carry out my duty."

She saw him wince.

Until the end of the week, Katherine maintained her cool indifference whenever she was with him, but in her room gave way to overwhelming misery.

There was no alternative—she must leave Masterton Hall, cut herself off from Lawrence, be rid of the torture of his daily presence and its reminder of his deceit.

First, though, she would solve that mystery surrounding him and—if necessary, see he was brought to justice. No man could prove so evasive in living out his life unless concealing something heinous.

Rising early on Saturday, she breakfasted before Lawrence and made for the lodge. Alone, John was repotting plants in the rear porchway. They exchanged a greeting and she stood, watching his gnarled, though nimble, fingers. Something about his task reassured her; perhaps its symbolism of continuity. All else might change, but she liked to believe John and Sarah would always pursue their roles here.

"I know you're reluctant to discuss Mr. Rushton's affairs, John, but I need your help. Do you believe me when I tell you it's more than curiosity that prompts the questions you're unwilling to answer?"

John nodded.

"You are loyal to your master. And like and respect him."

"He's been fair to Sarah and me, Miss Sutcliffe. He let us stay on when he dismissed the others."

"So he did dismiss them?"

". . . Er, yes, that is. . . " He coughed, bent again to his plant pots.

"All except Rivers?"

"Mr. Rivers, yes. He stayed on." John was frowning.

"And when was this departure of all the staff?"

"After the fire, of course. . . " John clapped a hand to his mouth. "Now look what you've made me say. Pretend you've never heard that, will you, Miss?" He caught her sleeve. "Please, I beg you, don't let on to the master."

"I won't say a word. But why, John? Why doesn't he want this . . . fire mentioned? That was, I suppose, what destroyed the east side of the Hall?"

John nodded. "Only remember what I said—don't talk of it."

"I've promised. But you know, John, I don't believe you need go in fear of Mr. Rushton. . . "

Even now, she defended what she had once believed to be a true assessment of him.

John smiled slightly. "Perhaps you're right—with Mr. Rivers gone. It was him put the fear of God into me—though he swore what he did was in the master's name."

"And what did he do?"

"It was threats mainly, I suppose, looking back on it. Only at the time it made us nervous. We never took to Mr. Rivers from the day he came here."

"And how long ago was that?"

"Something like four years now, I reckon; he came with Mr. . . ." He stopped.

"Yes?"

But John shook his head.

"No. I've said too much already. If

Sarah knew, she'd be wild. We made this pact, see—nobody'd learn anything from us—on account of Mr. Lawrence's kindness letting. . . "

Katherine feared he would launch into another discourse over their tenancy of the lodge—and that must wait. She discovered merely that there had been some fire—and she already knew that. It seemed obvious there was more to be unearthed. And today, John Saunders appeared a more ready informant than his wife. While she had him in talking mood, she meant to extract every possible relevant detail.

"And this fire, John, was it the accident where Mr. Rushton lost his hand?"

"Dreadful, it was—his wrist trapped by blazing timber. And all through trying to save that good for nothing woman." John turned away, setting pots on a shelf, fiddling with the plants in them. I've said more than enough. You must excuse me, I've work to do. I bid you good day . . . " He kept his back turned.

"Very well, John." Katherine sighed, disappointed by their conversation's abrupt ending. "Thank you," she added, leaving. "Be assured no one will learn of this."

Slowly, she walked across the park, through the copse, to the house. All the time thinking of Lawrence, of the horror of being pinned helplessly by the burning wood, forced to watch while the relentless fire robbed him of his right hand.

Had the shock of that incident done irreparable damage to him? Already, she was finding excuses for his behavior, her doubts about his integrity fading.

Letting herself into the mansion, Katherine realized again that she could not fail, whenever she thought of Lawrence, to see how desperately he needed understanding and compassion.

But what else was it that he had said? Something about Rivers. . . that Rivers had come to work in Masterton Hall four years ago; that he had not been dismissed when all the other servants had; and—yes, that he had arrived there with a Mr. . . . a Mr. who?

Still, there was something else in her conversation with John that troubled her. He had said that Lawrence had been burned trying to rescue *her*. Clearly, he must have meant Mrs. Rushton; but he hadn't said whether Lawrence had been successful or not. Once again, the thought that perhaps Mrs. Rushton was still alive—and was in fact the fair-haired woman she had seen him with in Maidstone—flooded her emotions.

Unable to withstand the swirl of emotion that possessed her, Katherine swept through the hall and into the drawing room, where Lawrence sat over a book.

She paused briefly before taking her place in the chair across from him. "Lawrence," she began, "I must have a word with you."

He looked up. "Yes, Kate?" His face was relaxed, calm. There was nothing written there to tell her he might be capable of the things of which she suspected him; yet her suspicions could not be quieted, and before she knew what she was doing, she had fallen into tears, and was answering him through sobs.

"You must tell me, Lawrence, for . . . I cannot bear it any longer . . ."

"Katherine," he said, leaning forward and tilting her face up with his hand, "what is it? What is this strange mood that has overtaken you?"

"I . . . I must know," she continued, attempting to collect herself, "about . . . your wife."

Without a word, Lawrence rose. White-faced, he took her arm and marched her to the hall. He snatched her cloak from its hook and tossed it to her. "Put that on . . ."

"But I . . . " Katherine began.

He grabbed her arm again, forcing her to the front door. He drew back the heavy bolts and flung it open, leaving it gaping behind them. Down the steps he ran, dragging Katherine after him—but for his hold on her, she would have fallen headlong.

His fingers biting into her arm, he strode across the lawns, through the copse and the meadow, toward the church.

Lawrence released her only to open the church door, then turned aside to a smaller one leading off from the vestibule. Taking a key from his pocket, he unlocked it and reached for a candle and matches from a ledge inside.

"Light that," he said.

Stone steps descended sharply, chill damp air wafting up, as Katherine followed him into the vault.

At the foot of the steps she stood still, gazing around at the monuments, the carved tombs, graves set in the floor.

Lawrence crossed to a huge marble sarcophagus, and set the candle beside it.

"Here . . ." he beckoned, and she stepped toward him, trying to suppress her echoing footsteps in the eerie stillness.

"Read that . . . "

Katherine read:

Here lie the mortal remains of
Samantha Victoria Rushton
wife of Lawrence Rushton
of Masterton Hall
died 30th March, 1873.

Katherine bit her lip to control the weeping now threatening to shake her body to fragments. She closed her eyes, thankful to know the truth at last, though half ashamed at how she had brought Lawrence to reveal it and half angry at him for revealing it thus.

"Now, will you believe me?" Lawrence took her hand, guiding her with him to the steps. He did not speak further, and Katherine could not.

Lawrence slammed and locked the door inside the church, then opened the outer one. Still, he said nothing more. Taking her by the arm again, he forced her at a brisk walk back the way they had come. The front door of the house still stood open, but he ignored it. Instead he went around the side to the east wing.

Unlocking a creaking door into the ruins, he nodded to her to go inside. He removed his coat, placed it on one of the fallen slabs of masonry.

"Sit, Katherine, and I shall tell you."

Katherine obeyed, thankfully.

She died here." Lawrence began. His voice sounded dreadfully tired. "A fitting place for recounting it . . . "

"There's no need . . . " Katherine protested.

"You say that—now. I think differently. I do not know, Kate, to what you're accustomed. But I cannot live like this—having my every word questioned. I have shared with you, Katherine more of what goes on in the heart of me, than with any other—alive or dead."

He sighed and walked away, looking down, stirring the dust with the toe of his boot. After what seemed an age, he continued, over his shoulder, avoiding her eyes, telling of the night of the fire.

"I became aware of somebody beside my bed—in the dressing room. It was

Samantha, attired for going out. I asked what was amiss, but she only shook her head and made for the door. I pursued her to the gallery, calling her to stop, but she ignored me, she . . .”

“Had there been some . . . trouble?”

“Trouble!” Lawrence snorted, facing her. “There was never anything else—but that's another story . . . She carried a candle, didn't light the gas mantles. She went through the gallery to my study—that room just beyond.” He glanced up to the door Katherine recalled vividly from her struggle with Rivers. “I reached the doorway as she was rifling my desk. I realized she had taken my keys, was seeking my recently completed manuscript. I understood. She was leaving me and taking it with them—*her,*” he corrected, paused, then continued: “Well, she found it, and I crossed to try snatching it from her. We . . . fought, I supposed; the candle was overturned, setting light to the pages. I made another grab for them, but she was nearer. She smiled, triumphantly.”

“Triumphantly?” Katherine interrupted, and Lawrence seemed startled to find her there still.

“Yes. She'd found the way to destroy me—by destroying my work. Better even than stealing it, as first intended. I salvaged some of the leaves, stamping out the flames. Now she had this . . . weapon, she laughed wildly, holding the pages she'd retained, one by one, to the candle, then tossing them onto the burning heap. Each time I went toward it she fended me off with blazing paper.”

Lawrence stopped, closed his eyes momentarily, then continued: “Finally, I seized her arm, intending to force her back to the gallery, but she fought like a vixen. I hung on—then, just when I believed I would overpower her, she reached for my silver inkstand. I felt the blow on the back of my head—knew nothing further. Some while later, I opened my eyes. Flames surrounded me. I looked around, couldn't see Samantha, and concluded she'd escaped. The heat was intense; smoke filled the room, making my eyes stream. I tried crawling along the floor, but now the carpet was smouldering. Coughing, scarcely able to see, my head reeling, I got to my feet.”

Lawrence paused, turning his gaze to Katherine. “From the far corner, a sheet of flame detached itself, began moving toward me. It was Samantha, her gown ablaze—only her eyes recognizable as human—terror-stricken eyes, beseeching me to help . . .

“Somehow, I reached her, dragged the curtains from the windows, wrapping them round her, then rolling her on the floor to extinguish the flames. All the while she was screaming, til her screams turned to moaning. All the flames wouldn't go out; each time I smothered them they broke out afresh, nothing would beat them.

“At last, they were quelled—then I discovered the room was an inferno. Glass cracked in the windows, the air fanning the blaze the more with each pane that broke. The curtains still hanging had caught fire, from them the paneling, pictures on the walls . . . ”

“But what of the rest of the household—did no one hear or see the fire—come to your rescue?”

Lawrence studied her for a minute, and sighed. “Rivers came—eventually, after the paneling had come tumbling down, blazing from the walls, and the ceiling started to cave in. When the beams were burning . . . ”

“Surely you could have run to safety?”

“And left Samantha . . . ?”

Katherine nodded. “Of course, she was your wife . . . ”

“No!” Lawrence contradicted, vehemently. “Not for a long time—not really. But she was another human being, unconscious. I was her only hope . . . ” his voice dropped, miserably—“I failed her.”

“But you tried, Lawrence, nobody could have done more.” It sounded so trite, how could it comfort him?

“I've told myself that ever since; only, at times, I wonder. Did hatred hold me back, prevent me trying hard enough?”

Katherine went to slip her arms round him; shaking her head. “It wouldn't—you're not like that.”

She felt him shrug, but his arms enveloped her, as though given something to cling to.

“I made another attempt to drag her out, but the carpet was setting fire to the curtains I'd wrapped her in. I swung her into my arms and, staggering against scorching furniture, stumbled toward the door.

“The beam fell as I reached for the handle. We were trapped; I was pinned by the shoulders and —” she sensed him look down to it, “this arm, as flames inched along that beam toward me . . . ”

Katherine hugged him. “It's over now, Lawrence, you survived—and I'm very thankful.”

* * *

Delicacy is to love what grace is to beauty.

Françoise d'Aubigné Maintenon
Maxims

He laughed without humor.

“Why haven't you had this part of the house restored?” she asked at length.

“It will remain as it is—as a reminder.”

“A . . . memorial? Isn't that macabre?”

“I said a reminder,” he replied, harshly. “Until all this is really over—the fire and its repercussions. Then, Kate, and only then, will it be restored.”

Subdued, Katherine joined Lawrence for luncheon that day, noticing the lines etched even more deeply, or so it seemed, around his mouth. She felt obliged to apologize for forcing him to re-live that dreadful experience—only she couldn't.

She had longed, almost from the start, to share everything of his—pain, too. Now that she had, she couldn't regret any part of it. She felt older and exhausted; but she was, nevertheless, glad he had confided in her.

She smiled wanly when Lawrence looked up as she came in. “It seems an eternity since breakfast . . . ”

He nodded, grimly. “I cannot pretend it has sharpened my appetite!”

Nor hers, she had to admit to herself. For, as much as her love and compassion had been raised by Lawrence's story earlier, she had not yet discovered why he had been in Maidstone that day, or with whom he had dined.

She told herself not to think of it, and to try only to cheer his spirits now. She led their conversation to different matters and, before the meal was ended, had got him to talk about Charles Dickens, whom he had met when he was a youth, through the auspices of Mr. Kingsley.

Still, as the days went on, the scene she had witnessed in Maidstone grew on her, troubling her in a profound way; that, and her certainty that there was so much more which surrounded the death of Samantha. Mrs. Hawkins became increasingly distant and became more distant from Lawrence.

She longed to ask him the unanswered questions: Why had he fired all the servants after Samantha's death? Why had he *not* dismissed Rivers? Who was the mysterious Mr.So and So who came to Masterton Hall when Rivers began working there—the man of whom John had made inadvertent mention?

And, of course, the question which haunted her dreams: Who was the fair-haired woman in Maidstone?

At the typewriter, weeks later, Katherine was puzzled when Lawrence abruptly ceased dictating.

"I've got that. Go on." She glanced across; he was scowling. He flung down his manuscript and stood up.

"Oh, I'm weary of this."

"We'll pause for a while—take the horses and—"

"No!" Lawrence roared, startling her. "You misunderstand—and purposely, I shouldn't wonder. I don't mean I'm weary of this book, though heaven knows it crawls along. It's this situation between us that disturbs me." He strode to the window, stared out, then swung round, facing her. He spoke very quietly, but his eyes were cold, wary. "Believe me, Katherine, I understand—can see how, given time to reconsider, you've reached a certain conclusion."

"Lawrence, what do you mean?" Had he read her turbulent emotions over the past weeks?

He sighed. "I hate hypocrisy, Kate, even if you seek through it to spare my feelings. It's plain enough; for weeks you haven't been yourself. Ever since—"

"Only because—" she began, but he interrupted, heatedly.

"And I, too, have been thinking—imagining what goes on in that head of yours." He paused, turned to gaze over the park again, his voice coming quietly, with considerable effort. "Katherine—I release you from any commitment to me."

"Lawrence!" She couldn't believe it. Was he going to . . . that Maidstone woman?

He faced her once more. "It is what you want, isn't it? To continue solely as my secretary . . . "

She must use her reeling brain, rationally, to discover the reason for his strange assumption.

"You're so wrong—this machine's useful to you—that's all I care."

"I think not, Kate." Eyes flashing, Lawrence advanced on her, his breathing agitated. A sweep of his hand sent the typewriter crashing to the ground. His eyes, meeting hers, were challenging.

Katherine sprang back, surveying the wreckage. "Look what you've done!"

Terrified by the change that came over him so suddenly, she fled the room, racing upstairs and nearly colliding with Janet who, dressed in her finest, was on her way to step out with George again.

"Kate?" Janet said, then turned about and followed her to her room.

At the door, Katherine turned. "I . . . I suppose," she began, trying vainly to collect her wits in the girl's presence, "I imagine you would want me to listen for Simon."

Janet shook her head. "But Katy, what is it, are you ill?"

Katherine grasped at the excuse. "Yes," she sighed, "an awful headache, terrible," and, seeing Janet's compassionate eyes, nearly burst into tears.

"Get some rest, then," Janet advised, and leaned over to kiss her cheeks. "I'll stop in when I get home."

Katherine dropped onto her bed the moment her door was closed, and wept.

She fell into a deep slumber once she had divested herself of her tears, and, if Janet stopped in when she had returned, Katherine was unaware of it, for she did not awaken until the morning.

After taking a hasty breakfast in the kitchen—much to the astonishment of Mrs. Hawkins—she slipped outside. A walk about the lake would restore her, she thought, and help her to ready herself to confront Lawrence with those last troublesome questions. It was the absence of their answers, she had realized, which had cast her into the mood which Lawrence had misinterpreted as indifference. She would refresh herself, and ask him. Surely, each question had a reasonable answer—even the question of the fair-haired woman in Maidstone.

Skirting the trees surrounding the lake, she thought she saw someone move, and paused to watch. A man was leading a horse, his tall figure, glimpsed through the trees, easily recognizable.

"Lawrence . . . " she called; then observed the woman at the other side of the animal. A woman with fair curls—the person she had seen in Maidstone.

"Oh, no!" She put a hand to her mouth, uncertain whether she'd spoken the words aloud. The man started, then leaned toward his companion, saying something.

Katherine had no wish to witness more. She turned away and hurried toward the house.

Halfway across the meadow, she sensed somebody following her, and suddenly she didn't want to stop. If it was Lawrence she wanted only to get away from him. Snatching up her skirts, she ran for the cover of the copse.

A hand came down hard on her shoulder, biting into her flesh, imprisoning her.

"Lawrence!" she screamed. "Stop, you're hurting me!"

He grappled with her, his strength frightening her; she'd never been aware of such power in his arms. If this was some game, she saw no reason for it. Then she remembered that woman. This was no game—Lawrence intended to be rid of her.

She tried to wriggle away.

"No, you don't!"

"Let me go," she pleaded. "I'll free you—you can go to her."

He laughed—an odd sound, unlike him; had something unhinged him? And still he wouldn't release her. She bent almost double trying to escape.

He slid his fingers along her shoulder toward her troat.

His grip tightened; it seemed to be squeezing the life out of her.

She heard hooves, pounding through the trees, then . . . nothing.

Later, much later, Katherine opened her eyes to find she was in her room; with a start, she saw Lawrence standing by the window. Her throat ached abominably; she put a hand to it, trying to swallow.

As though alert for the slightest movement, he turned and came toward her.

"Katherine, thank God . . . " He made as if to sit on the edge of the bed.

She was petrified. "No, Lawrence, keep away!"

"But, Kate," he protested, "I've waited here for hours—or so it seemed. I've sent for Dr. McLaren, I've . . . "

"But why? When a short while ago you wanted only to be rid of me?"

His eyes were solemn. "Listen, Kate, that wasn't . . . "

"Not you? Come now, I'm not stupid."

"I can explain it all," he interrupted, but Katherine, shaking her head, refused to look at him.

"Not any longer. You see, Lawrence, I've listened to your last explanation. There can be no possible justification for your attack on me. I told you—you only had to say—I'd have let . . . let you . . . go to her." A lump came into her throat, precluding further speech. She closed her eyes, then forced out the words. "Please, leave me . . . "

Katherine heard her door click open and close. Lawrence's footsteps receded along the corridor and she began to breathe more easily.

She opened her eyes to survey the room. Her tiny gilt clock read one-thirty. She would wait—until she believed Lawrence was eating luncheon—the servants resting after the meal. With luck, she could leave unobserved.

She dragged herself toward the washstand, putting a hand to her head as she almost fainted again. She splashed cold water on to her face, then gasped in horror, seeing her swollen face and throat. Why had Lawrence seized her so violently—why stopped short of killing her?

She sighed, shaking her head. Everything was utterly baffling, and she was in no state to unravel it. She could only flee from here—and quickly. Before nightfall she must be miles away. But how could she effect her escape? She couldn't walk any distance—she could scarcely cross the room.

Then Katherine remembered the horse. She would take Midnight, leave a note stating her intention; no one must believe her capable of stealing the mare. She would ride to Maidstone, leave Midnight at the coaching inn, then take the London train. From there, she'd make the necessary changes of train for Yorkshire.

And what would she tell her family? That, too, would be difficult; during the journey she must find some explanation.

Katherine took a small bag from the wardrobe, cramming into it her clock, hairbrush, and nightgown. More than that she could not carry—and, indeed, could spare no time for. What money she possessed she thrust into a pocket in the bag, then tied a kerchief 'round her neck, concealing those marks. She slipped from the room with no backward glance—leaving the place was distressing enough, without adding further pain.

It was a simple task to hurry downstairs and out through the side door. Murmuring voices confirmed the servants were in their quarters, and going this way she could avoid the dining room windows.

Reaching the stables, without detection, she saddled Midnight, swiftly, talking soothingly to the animal. Then they were away—galloping toward the North Lodge, this being unoccupied. It was useless thinking to pass Sarah and John's home.

Out on the road, Katherine sensed a certain reluctance in Midnight, who was accustomed to the softer parkland.

The Maidstone Inn came in sight. Soon she would dismount, call one of the lads, hand over the reins to him.

Exactly as Katherine imagined, a scruffy boy of about twelve received her instructions to care for the horse, pending collection by Lawrence. And that was it. The end.

◆

If with pleasure you are viewing any work a man is doing,
If you like him or you love him, tell him now.

Berton Braley
Do It Now

◆

She laid her head against the horse's neck, then patted her—and was reminded of a similar gesture, frequently repeated, from Lawrence to his mount, Reveller.

Katherine turned, hastily, running from the inn's courtyard.

The animal neighed. Katherine stopped, almost turned back; but, blinking rapidly, hurried toward the station. She must get right away from anything and everything that could remind her . . .

Past the jewelers where she had bought Lawrence that silver tiepin, the place where she purchased Simon's farmyard.

Simon. If only she could have seen him just once more . . .

Thankfully, Katherine at last stepped aboard the London train; now there would be no changing her mind, no going back. She won this last battle with Lawrence Rushton, and with her love for him. In a few days she would be home.

Katherine's mother glanced out of the window to discover who had drawn up outside their cottage in a carriage.

"Henry!" she called to her husband, sitting beside the kitchen range. "It's our Katherine—and by the look of her she's poorly!"

In her own home at last, Katherine gave her parents a wan smile, after greeting them. "I'm all right—really I am. You must not fuss so."

"Then what are you doing here, my girl?" her father asked, in his bluff North Country way. "You haven't left that fine job of yours, have you? Your letters always spoke well enough of that Mr. Rushton . . ." Hazel eyes anxiously searched her tired face.

Katherine sighed. Even here, it seemed, she wasn't allowed to forget the man.

Her mother stopped halfway to the burner with a kettle, awaiting her answer. Katherine looked from one to the other, wishing they'd delay their interrogation. "You mustn't worry, either of you. I . . . I'm here for a holiday, that is all." There. That would give her time to think.

During her absence, Katherine had forgotten how her parents' concern expressed itself in a need to know the ins and outs of everything. She wasn't prepared for that—she couldn't yet accept the situation herself, much less explain it.

To ward off their probing while drinking tea, Katherine turned the questions on them, asking how her sister, Clare, was faring—teaching at the local school. They eagerly related how well-liked their younger daughter was by headmaster and pupils. And so, albeit temporarily, Katherine was spared further quizzing.

After the tea, she made the exhausting journey her excuse for going to bed.

This set her mother flurrying to heat a warming-pan.

"That bed must not be slept in without a thorough airing."

Before Clare joined her in their room beneath the eaves, Katherine was asleep. So she awakened next morning to the girl's curious questions. Katherine told her the story she had given her parents and she also appeared to accept it. Katherine wondered how she would explain when time elapsed and she did not return to Masterton Hall, but that could wait.

As soon as her sister went downstairs, Katherine crossed to pour water into the washstand bowl. The mirror revealed that the red marks on her throat were turning color, becoming bruises; and how unsightly they were! She must continue using that kerchief to hide them, until she could find an old, high-necked dress. She re-examined the marks. There were so many—all about her throat.

This way and that she turned, scrutinizing the purple fingerprints, counting . . . One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight . . . She stopped.

There couldn't be—it was utterly impossible.

How could a man with but one hand leave more than five such prints? Her heart jumped—it hadn't been Lawrence!

Only she *knew* it had—she recognized him, looked into his eyes at that last awful moment, heard his voice, his laughter. Only that, she remembered, had sounded strange . . .

"Katherine." Her mother's voice, calling from the foot of the stair, recalled her to the reality of breakfast.

"Coming . . . " Hurriedly, she washed face and hands, slipped on her dress, knotting the kerchief over it. During breakfast she forced her attention to the conversation, away from the events bringing her here.

Presently, Clare departed for the school and their father returned to the fields, leaving Katherine with her mother. She left with the older woman's eyes—green like her own, though fading with age—on her, and wasn't surprised when her mother cleared her throat, awkwardly.

"Katherine . . . is there anything you want to tell me? Something you couldn't say in front of your father?"

Katherine shook her head. "I am perfectly well—there's no reason for concern."

"But you're so pale—has he been working you too hard?"

"Perhaps," she replied, evasively. "I told you—I've come for a rest . . . " She took a deep breath; the inquisition was never ending. Yet she understood. She had traveled farther than any member of her family and, although writing frequently, had not previously returned on a visit. And now, here she was, turning up without prior arrangement.

Katherine smiled. "When I've helped with the dishes, I'll prove I'm fit by taking a walk."

"You'd best fetch that young pup out of the barn then—don't let him worry the sheep, mind."

"A puppy—you mean old Martha's had another litter? You didn't write of it."

"Like as not, I did and you've forgotten. Three months old, he is, and we're stuck with him. The rest of the bunch went easy enough, but he's a funny little thing. One leg shorter than the rest—though he moves fast enough . . . "

"What's his name?"

Her mother laughed. "Haven't found him one yet—happen you will."

Opening the barn door, Katherine whistled. A small black object hurled itself at her. She went down on one knee to scratch the top of his head, while he twisted this way and that, trying to lick her hands and face, tail wagging furiously.

She stroked the glossy coat, its puppy curl straightening into adult doghood. Why must he be black? Tears stung her eyes, remembering her—*Lawrence's*—fine mare, Midnight. She looked down, ruefully, at the frisking animal. Maybe he'd be good for her—something to love, something new to think about. She frowned, noticing the peculiar limping run as he made for the gate, though it didn't inhibit him. He seemed to skip along.

"Skip!" she called, and he turned, panting, head on one side. Katherine smiled—he had a name now.

She took her favorite path for the tarn. The small lake was unfrequented. She had a deal of thinking to do; away from worried eyes and perpetual questioning.

The wind was keen at the top of the rise, but the sun tempered it. Katherine gazed beyond the tarn to the valley, with moors to one side, limestone peaks to the other. She used to spend hours absorbing the serenity of this view.

She walked to the edge of the tarn to sit on a boulder, listlessly tossing stones into the water.

Skip snuffled in the grass, hither and thither, following different trails. Was this how she had been, searching and never finding, only to return to the beginning? Skip settled at her feet, yawned, then laid his head on his paws.

Katherine fondled the short hair behind his ears, thinking—but not of Skip.

Instinctively, Katherine touched her throat, trying to determine how two sets of finger marks got there. It had been Lawrence, walking the horse; she knew his stride, the set of his head, and heard his voice. She had even looked him in the face, before she'd heard . . . what? Still she could not remember, though believed it connected with Lawrence. Yet there he had been, starting to squeeze life itself from her . . .

Katherine sighed. She thought of his anger with Simon. Dashing her typewriter to the ground.

Skip was wandering restlessly—she must return to the cottage.

"Oh, Lawrence," she thought, "why try to kill me? You need only have said you loved someone else; I would have left . . . "

During luncheon, feeling out of place at her parents' table, Katherine repeatedly had to retrieve her straying thoughts from a certain dining room—and the man eating in solitude. For that was how she saw him, despite commanding herself to remember the fair-haired woman. Oh, what a nonsense it was. And, away from the terror of those hands at her throat, how she wished she hadn't fled so precipitately.

Lawrence had begged her to hear his explanation—for perhaps the first time since her arrivl at Masterton, he had wanted to reveal something. And she had refused to listen.

Annoyed by this wavering, Katherine wrote to Janet that afternoon, asking that she pack her possessions into her trunk and send it after her. That way no belongings of hers would remain at Masterton. She would discipline herself, eventually, to withdraw her thoughts as well from Lawrence Rushton.

Day succeeded day, each bringing Katherine more strength, recovering from the ordeal—and each increasing her misery. By day, walking alone, she fancied he walked beside her. And this was wrong, she should be setting her mind to securing employment. Her family could not support her. Already, Clare had asked when she would return to Kent, soon they'd all be asking. Oh, if only . . .

Her trunk finally arrived, heralded by Janet's letter, of which snatches haunted Katherine for days . . .

Why did you leave so suddenly? Master Simon keeps asking why you don't come to play—he thinks you're *cross with him . . . After you were found missing the master had us into his study, one by one. Mrs. Hawkins, George, me, Isobel and the others—to ask if we knew where you were . . . He's more ill-tempered than ever . . . The master strides from room to room, hardly sits at his desk at all . . . Sometimes I hear sounds from the music room, not music, though—a dreadful thumping on the organ.*

Katherine put her head in her hands. No one would have gone to him, no one calmed him.

But he knows why, she persisted, to the empty room. She wrote back immediately, nevertheless, not so much to thank Janet for sending the trunk, as to express concern about Mr. Rushton. Maybe, somehow, he would learn of it.

Returning from the tarn one morning, Skip at her heels, Katherine realized with a start that it was a month since her arrival in Yorkshire. Every mark had vanished from her throat. She was glad; the mirror no longer reminded her there was reason for doubting Lawrence had been her attacker.

She had reread Janet's letter repeatedly, confirming the girl made no mention of any woman at Lawrence's side. Every word, indeed, stressed his isolation.

Despite the passing weeks, nothing made sense for Katherine. Without Lawrence there seemed no reason for anything—certainly none for living. Her family may have accepted her presence, but she was far from accepting this way of life . . . this unhappiness. Yet she made no effort to find another post—perhaps because something within her refused to release her hold on the last.

A letter awaited her at luncheon. Recognizing Janet's hand, she tore open the envelope.

My dear Katy,

I must let you know that all is not well here. You do not say why you left, but I am sure you still care about Mr. Rushton, and I'm afraid something is very wrong. The whole house was roused by a dreadful row one night. The master was in the hall, shouting at—who do you think? Mr. Rivers. Yes, he'd come back. None of us knows why, but there he was, large as life. The master took a pistol to frighten him off, then Mr. Rivers ran from the house— and Mrs. Hawkins with him. What do you think of that?

But the worst of it is, Mr. Rushton looks so ill, as though Mr. Rivers brought him bad news. I've been helping with the cooking and he doesn't eat enough to keep a sparrow alive. And, Katy, oh Katy—he does look so miserable. My heart aches for him, it does really; and you know there's no love lost between us on account of Master Simon. (Oh, yes, he still asks after you.)

But, Katy, I am worried—Mr. Rushton is so unlike himself. At first he was always angry with somebody, but now he seems to have lost all spirit. He wanders about the place as if searching for something—or somebody—he'll never find. I saw him out in the grounds this morning, just standing there, looking . . . at the window of your old room.

Couldn't you forgive whatever wrong he has done?

Unable to read further before the curious eyes of her family, Katherine excused herself from the table and went to her room. She read the letter again, tears streaming down her face.

That night she scarcely slept; tossing this way and that.

As day began to break, Katherine wakened from a light doze. She dressed quietly, not to disturb Clare, and, as soon as her father had gone to the fields she crossed the yard. Opening the barn door, she called Skip, then watched him run ahead in the direction of the tarn.

She walked all the way round it, taking some time because she moved slowly, deep in thought.

So much had gone unexplained, yet through it all had come a love she could neither stifle nor ignore, even miles away from him. It refused to founder under anything that occurred. No disaster could extinguish it. She heard his voice, sounding so close he might have been beside her, "Only trust me . . ."

Katherine sat beside the tarn. She shivered. It was still early, and yet, the sun had no heat in it. The wind swept across the top of the hiss, as always here. Katherine rose, began throwing sticks for Skip to retrieve, laughing at his lopsided run as he brought them to her.

"You go for the cripples still, I see!" The voice, from behind her, carried some distance by the wind, was unmistakable.

She put both hands to suddenly feverish cheeks and turned slowly, afraid to have the emptiness of space mock her. But he was there.

◆

Love scarce is Love that never knows
The sweetness of forgiving.

John Greenleaf Whittier
Among the Hills

"Lawrence!"

He stood looking at her, uncertainly, scowling, worried. His dark eyes were moist when she stepped toward him.

"Your coat's wet," she remarked, at last.

"Only with dew. It's of no consequence." He was smiling now.

"But how . . . what on earth . . .?"

He laughed then. "Oh, my Kate, I was so afraid . . ."

"How did you get here?" she asked.

"Train to Keighley—I threatened Janet with dismissal if she didn't tell me where to find you. I had seen your trunk go off, you see. Not very loyal to you, is she? Will you reprimand her?"

Katherine shook her head, gazing at him, unable to believe he wasn't some figment of her imagination.

"Why did you decide to come, Lawrence?"

"Isn't that obvious? But the thing that gave me heart to . . . "

A tiny smile played 'round his thin lips for a second—he brought a scrap of paper from an inside pocket. Dogeared, as though from much handling, he straightened it before giving it to her.

Katherine frowned, then recognized it. She had sat one day, hadn't she, trying to sense what it was like—having only the one hand for writing?

She met his eyes.

Lawrence nodded, his voice became hushed: "It was like a message from you—although I told myself it wasn't any such thing. I couldn't dismiss it, though. For a whole evening I sat in our music room, gazing at this. It seemed to say there was still just a little hope. That someone with enough compassion to try and learn . . . how . . ." He stopped, gestured awkwardly with his left hand, shrugged.

Unable to speak, Katherine nodded, blinking hard. She cleared her throat, managed a smile.

"And when do you say you arrived?"

"Last evening, by hired carriage from the station to your home. Then courage deserted me. I walked for a time, around the tarn here—telling myself the worst that could happen would be that I'd be shown the door. Only that wasn't the worst—and I knew it. I dreaded having you turn from me again. But you didn't, did you?" His arm about her shoulders tightened, as they descended the hill.

"What did you do—since you daren't knock on the door?"

"Walked some more—thought a great deal—slept just a little."

"But where?"

Lawrence chuckled. "There's a sort of sheep-corral, I suppose, way over there—beyond the hillside."

"Oh, Lawrence, you didn't!"

"And if you mention one word of that I *will* strangle you!" Eyes grave again, he turned her to face him. "You do know it wasn't me?"

Katherine nodded. He put his arm about her again, and they walked.

"I'll tell you who it was and the . . ." He sighed, "I have to make it right—if I can. I can't go on living like this . . ."

As they wandered hand in hand down the hillside, she asked how long he could stay.

"I wish I could stay, until I've persuaded you to return to Masterton Hall but I must go back tomorrow—to be in court the following day."

"In court?" She took a swift breath, trying to steady her uneven pulse.

"You see—there are things out of my past. They must be cleared, as I told you before. So that when . . . if—" he paused and then sighed "—if you marry me, it'll be with everything wiped clean, starting afresh; I won't have it any other way."

"Marry . . . ?" She gasped. "Oh, Lawrence, tell me. Tell me now of these things that haunt you from your past. Tell me everything so I might say yes."

And there, on the hillside where she spent her childhood, Lawrence Rushton answered all those unanswered questions.

"Kate," he said, "It's so hard to know where to begin." He paused. "There will be an examination. At my request. There have been certain . . . rumors, since Samantha died . . ."

Kate frowned. "That must mean—so, Rivers *was* blackmailing you."

"He—and another, yes. It didn't alarm me greatly. I could pay, while I continued working, and I love my work. There was money enough to go on paying for the rest of my life, if the need arose. I had no guilt weighing me down, and didn't care—what people whispered. Then you entered my life: I learned what treasure there is in the love and comfort of a good woman. I . . . wanted you. So, everything changed. I had to stop those accusations before they drove you, my love, away."

Lawrence hesitated, gnawing at his lip, then continued. "I tried to buy them off, once and for all; I would have given them anything, excepting the house . . . Well, they took what money I had and returned for more. It couldn't go on. I tried—you might remember—to write more speedily, to accede to their demands. But that's no way . . ."

Again he stopped, staring beyond her to the hills, then appeared to collect himself.

"What I ought to do was so obvious I wondered I hadn't thought of it before. I searched until I found a lawyer willing to defend me if . . . if I'm charged with murder."

"You wouldn't be."

"Ha!"

"So that was the reason for those business visits to London?"

Lawrence nodded. "Partly. He took some finding—the evidence is weighted heavily against me."

"But, why?"

"I alone know what occurred in that room the night of the fire. It's my word against theirs, and numerous witnesses could testify I'd every reason for being murderously angry with Samantha."

"But I don't understand . . ."

His eyes filled with the memory of an old, not yet healed wound as he went on. "You see, I have reason to believe that Samantha was unfaithful to me. Not only had she long ceased being a wife to me, but she herself told me that Simon was not my son."

Katherine's head spun. Simon, not his son? Though he resembled Samantha, she knew, he did bear some resemblance to Lawrence, too. But before she could say as much, Lawrence was speaking again.

"There is something I've never told you, Katherine—I have a brother, Barnabas. A twin brother." He touched her face. "It was he who tried to kill you that day . . . " His eyes were filled with tears now. "When I came out to the lake that day and saw him . . . strangling you . . . I leaped at him, grabbing the pitchfork which John had left where he had been working. I . . . I stopped him from killing you, and came very close to killing *him*. In fact, he has been in hospital all this time, lingering. He is not expected to live."

Katherine put her arm to his shoulder. "You don't have to continue, darling," she said, her own thoughts in a swirl. So much was clear now. The finger marks on her neck . . . of course it hadn't been Lawrence . . . And the name, Barnabas—she had heard that somewhere before . . .

"No," he said. "Let us have it in the air now, once and for all. It began years ago. Barnabas and I were six years old. There was a swing on our terrace. One dreadful day, we were called in for tea—but Barnabas refused to leave the swing. Nanny said we should ignore him. She was buttering bread when we heard the screams. I ran downstairs after her. Barnabas was on the ground, unconscious. For weeks he knew no one—then, gradually, he returned to normal. Or so we thought."

"But . . . ?"

"First it was a pheasant, found with its neck wrung, then a young deer, its head caught in a noose, then . . . Lord, it was awful!"

Katherine saw how the memory pained him still.

"Nanny had a love child, Matthew, who'd been accepted by everyone from the day she brought him there, when he was a few weeks old. Matthew was almost two when—you know what children are—he borrowed a toy fort belonging to Barnabas and somehow smashed the thing. Barnabas flew into such a rage it took Father as well as Nanny to quiet him.

"Next morning," Lawrence swallowed hard, "Matthew was found, his skull fractured, beneath the nursery window."

"Oh, God!"

"Nanny was distraught, we all were, but believed it was an accident until . . . Barnabas boasted to me that he'd pushed the boy.

"I had to tell somebody. That night Barnabas was taken away—to a special place, they said. And Father forbade mention of his name. He was an influential man—when he ordered the local people to forget Barnabas existed, it was so."

"Then how . . . ?" Katherine started asking, and Lawrence snorted.

"I was too soft. After Father died, I let Barnabas return, though keeping his presence a secret from the villagers. He was supposedly cured. Father's will, after provision for Mother, made the two of us joint heirs. I believed that, allowed to pursue my writing, nothing else would disturb me."

"And Barnabas has been at Masterton, concealed, all these years?"

"Indeed not—he soon grew restive and demanded his share at once. The family lawyer drew up a document in which he waived his claim on the house, the whole estate, for an equivalent amount of money. He went off—to the Continent, initially, then heaven knows where—but always gambling, keeping his women happy . . . " Lawrence laughed, mirthlessly. "Always women in his life—and always the same kind; like Samantha; blue eyes, fair hair . . . " His eyes blazed angrily, he lowered their lids for a second and then continued, quietly. "He returned from time to time—when his money ran out."

"Ran out? But . . . " Katherine's Yorkshire thrift was outraged.

"Yes, it was a considerable sum. But when my brother was destitute I finally gave him a home."

"And Rivers?"

"*And* Rivers—because Barnabas claimed he kept him out of trouble. So we made Rivers our manservant and tried to live as an ordinary family—within the confines of the estate. Outside it, still, he no longer existed. And I was too preoccupied to worry too much about him, to even notice his presence, having only recently married Samantha."

He sighed, then went on: "I was younger than my years—naive. Samantha, when we met, seemed like something from a fairy tale. Dainty, pretty, delightful.

"Once we returned from our honeymoon, I discovered her true self. Impatient with the servants, excepting Rivers—when he came I believe she imagined he added a certain . . . tone. I used to watch her watching him when we were entertaining, sensing her satisfaction as he impressed. Oh, many's the time he has won me compliments for his exquisite bearing. He would have been excellent—in a palace. Only this wasn't . . . and neither was it a home. Indeed, as time wore on, I felt I was the one out of place.

"She and Barnabas were always laughing together, whispering in corners, eyeing each other across the room . . . She even insisted he had portraits painted, installed alongside mine . . . "

"Poor Lawrence."

"I wasn't giving her what she wanted. She had my money, but she'd found I wasn't her kind. Barnabas was. I soon learned that what I had once thought of as her special way with me was her way with all men—and particularly my brother. Those blue, coquettish eyes sought his now, not mine; although I did not recognize the full significance of what was happening then. I told myself she was a flirt. I didn't like the idea, but I could live with it. Later, I learned something I couldn't live with."

"Simon?"

Lawrence nodded, biting his lip. "Vivid as my imagination was, I'd never seen myself as a father. But when I first glimpsed that infant something happened inside me." He was deeply moved; Katherine went to sit near him. "I could have wept—he was red, wrinkled, and screaming like the very devil, but he won my heart from that moment. I was a fool over the boy—fooled!"

Lawrence reflected, then went on. "The party the night of the fire celebrated his Christening next day. All through dinner, Samantha looked radiant, excited, more beautiful than I'd ever seen her. But nothing pleased her; she complained about the food, the way it was served—then went on to tell everyone how I neglected her. You know what I'm like when I'm working—but I'd warned her, from the start, whom she was marrying."

"And . . . " Katherine prompted, for he was silent again.

"She began hinting—about her and Barnabas. The first time he'd been present before guests, I had introduced him as recently returned from abroad. Then it happened. Barnabas was to be one of the godfathers. Somebody was ribbing him about taking on a serious responsibility. That's when she announced, her eyes challenging me: 'Barnabas is responsible for Simon.' I couldn't believe my ears! Looking round the table, I saw embarrassment on every face, and the gasp that sounded confirmed it to be more than my imagination. I told myself Samantha had had too much wine—that it was a particularly tasteless joke. Until we were alone—and I confronted her with it."

"Oh, Lawrence . . . " Katherine sighed, feeling what he must have felt.

The Lost Cameo

by Laurence E. Estes

There is a cameo, cut and burnished by the Wind,
Long sought by men who deal in precious stones,
That bears the topaz of the somber eastern skies
With shades and shadows of all bluish tones

The Wind who modeled this matchless miniature
Loved a nymph who lived on an island in the sea
And cut the smoldering fire in the gem,
For his love was wild and passionate and free—

Nor stopped when the gem was cut and sparkling,
But molded the likeness of his island love
And breathed the spirit of her dusky features
And bore the gem unto the lonely island's cove.

The nymph, under the Sea-Moon's tantalizing spell
Laughed at the Wind and all his ardent pursuing,
But crept into his arms for one quick moment
And found his arms were strong and strange his way of wooing.

The cameo he gave her as he left to go,
"This be our trysting stone, and part of you and me,"
And he smiled at her in the Sea-Moon's light;
Waved the trees with his young arms and waded to sea.

But as the nymph was running up the sandy shore
The Moon in jealous rage lashed forth a gleaming hand
And snatched the trysting stone from her dusky throat,
And hurled it spinning across the island's sand.

You may see her still in the dawning misty light
Just as the Wind sculptured her so many eons ago
The beautiful morning star of whom poets sing such praise,
But only the Moon and Wind were fortunate to know.

◆

"She laughed in my face. 'Calculate it yourself—he was conceived during one of *your* precious visits to your publishers.' I tried to believe that could not be. But I knew it was possible—that she had it in her to do that to me. Each time I look at the boy, I see her mouth reminding me, and *his* eyes, *his* hair— so nearly mine, but not!"

He looked up and Katherine drew in her breath at the sadness in his eyes. "I did try with Simon, after you came—because you despised my treatment of him."

"Lawrence, I shouldn't have—I was entirely wrong."

"And wasn't I? Punishing an innocent child because I saw Barnabas in every tiny wilful action. Anyway, Samantha and Barnabas were leaving after the Christening. But Simon would remain, to inherit. Maybe they intended my death, planned to return . . . At least, I anticipated her taking the manuscript; she had been unduly interested in its completion. I realized she and Barnabas would have to raise money somehow."

"But your publisher wouldn't have . . ."

". . . paid him, masquerading as me? Come, Kate—you know how easily he was mistaken for me."

"Oh, yes."

"Well, that didn't *come* about. Maybe that would have been less painful. It's not . . . pleasant, being blackmailed, by your own flesh . . . "

"So that's gone on since the fire . . . "

Lawrence nodded. "Barnabas made off immediately afterward, but returned the day of the funeral—demanding money. He and Rivers had this tale that the fire and Samantha's death were not accidental, but my revenge for being made a laughing-stock. And its plausibility could be upheld by everyone at that dinner."

Katherine covered his hand; Lawrence smiled, ruefully. "I never dreamed it would be so serious. I fondly imagined I need only wait—rid myself of all reminders. The staff was changed—excepting Rivers. Oh, Kate, Kate, I forbade mention of their names—his and Samantha's—but overlooked the constant reminder, growing daily more like the pair of them . . . "

"Don't, my love . . . "

Lawrence ignored her protest: "Forgetting Barnabas wasn't achieved by

CAMEO
LOVE SIGNS

by Phoebe Matthews

LIBRA
SEPT. 23-OCT. 23

October sunlight filters through the golden autumn leaves, its color matching your mellow Libra mood. While the sun lingers in your sign, enhancing your natural vivacity, wise Mercury guides you through a change in fortune that may leave you breathless for a few days but will ultimately bring enrichment, despite the foreboding overtones of an unwanted, angry Mars message. If the moon does not shine kindly on the more romantic areas of your life this month, find solace in friends who wish to lend their love to ease your heartaches. On the 28th a new, far-reaching influence from the planet Jupiter spreads through your life, bringing brighter tomorrows. *Romantic days: 3, 8, 18.*

SCORPIO
OCT. 24-NOV. 21

While you gaze into your mirror, dissatisfied with your abundant Scorpio beauty, clever Mercury swings about in your sign and weaves a change in style to enhance your charms, perhaps with a new cut or autumn shading for your tresses. A touch of autumn yellow in your costume puts you in the right mood for strolling through the falling leaves with a charming, romantic friend, a gift to you from sentimental Venus. Mars energy increases your fortunes through your own wise efforts, though a cherished past relationship could also lend its magic spell. When the sun enters your sign on the 24th, its generous warmth could surround you with newfound joys. *Romantic days: 6, 11, 31.*

SAGITTARIUS
NOV. 22-DEC. 21

The rich reds of maple leaves worn in a flowing scarf or frock enhance your natural Sagittarius warmth, adding to the October joys of rekindled friendships and, perhaps, a sentimental journey encouraged by a message reaching out to you from some happy moment in the past. Although a letter that you'd hoped for may not arrive this month, lucky Venus offers her benevolent guidance toward goals that could easily turn your lifestyle toward desired rewards. When Mars energy flows through your sign after the 13th, accept it as you would a cheery fire in the hearth, drawing from it the strength to meet challenges, but maintaining your wise Sagittarius caution. *Romantic days: 8, 22, 26.*

CAPRICORN
DEC. 22-JAN. 20

Deep purple shadows of October evenings suggest the warm, dark shadows that so become your mysterious Capricorn beauty. Luxuriate in a soft scarf or sweater, wander the pathways enjoying the carpets of falling leaves with a clever, if somewhat chatty gentleman, and do not let some drop in wealth depress you. This is a temporary setback, and fortune, from another, unexpected source, should reach out to cushion you by the month's end. Annoyances from forgotten situations should solve themselves with time, so use the moon's energy after the 16th to turn your troubled thoughts to a happier, more loving and romantic journey into a realm of new encounters, with Venus as your guide. *Romantic days: 11, 24, 28.*

AQUARIUS
JAN. 21-FEB. 19

October, with its tangled patterns of sun and wind, may leave you spinning like a falling leaf, so use your winsome Aquarius wisdom to temper your encounters and blend exciting interludes with long periods of much-needed rest and tranquility. With moon energy on the 3rd lighting a pathway toward exciting, far-reaching relationships, plus passionate Venus stirring romance from the least expected corners of your life, choose your heart's direction and follow happily, but surround yourself with the subtle, tender blends of autumn browns and ivory shades that allow you to retain your natural grace and reserve. If a friend disappoints you, find comfort in a warm-hearted advisor. *Romantic days: 13, 18, 26.*

PISCES
FEB. 20-MARCH 20

The rich, bright greens of October sunlight on misty fields add charming touches to your background, matching your surges of enthusiasm this month as you pursue a rapidly growing relationship that even now is guided by passionate Venus. An overflow of romantic happenings after the 6th should come as no surprise, unraveling tangled feelings as though they were ribbons on a box of expected gifts! Your mystical Pisces perception guides you now through minor Mars-sent conflicts with a domineering gentleman to thoughtful compromises, so that you will find, to your peace of mind, that worries from a past entanglement will smooth themselves away by October's end. *Romantic days: 1, 16, 28.*

removing portraits . . . "

Katherine recalled the spaces on the gallery walls.

" . . . even when he wasn't demanding money, he took to coming to Maidstone, to the house."

She drew in her breath; Lawrence nodded.

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"I almost did—but couldn't trust myself to control my emotions. You see, he had been there that day, flaunting his latest woman, because she's so like Samantha."

"How long has he got?"

"Dr. McLaren says he may linger for weeks. I'll do my duty—be with him at the last."

He fell silent for a long while, looking over the countryside with blind eyes.

Katherine thought over his words, deciding at last that she still could love this man whose past had so embittered him, but whose heart was still alive to love. He had saved her life; and though struggles lay ahead of him—of *them*—she was sure that all would end well. It *had* to.

The sun was nearing noontime, and with a start, she realized they had been talking for several hours. Her mother must have the midday meal on the board by now.

"Come," she said at length, rising and extending her hand to him. He stood, stiffly, from where he had been sitting. "Let me introduce you to my family."

It was one of the oddest meals Katherine had ever sat down to. After she had introduced Lawrence as her employer, here in Yorkshire on business and, after that, to take her back to work, Lawrence immediately added that it wasn't only to work. "If, of course, sir," he said, turning to Henry Sutcliffe, "you would grant Katherine's hand in marriage to me . . . "

The rest of the day was spent in hasty plans for Katherine's parents and sister to come to Masterton, well before the wedding day—which. in her own jumbled state, Katherine had named (to Lawrence'ce conspiratorial smile) as two months hence. Henry Sutcliffe sent his hired boy to the village after a carriage. "We mustn't have Mr. Rushton and our Katherine late for their train," he said.

So happy was Katherine on the trip back—happy at how eagerly her family had accepted Lawrence and he, them—

OCTOBER 1980

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

A Venus-inspired rendezvous with romance that began last month turns, like autumn leaves, into a sun-warmed golden glow that strengthens your love relationship with your favorite flame. If your happiness is shadowed by an undesired response from one you thought a friend, use your true Aries compassion to override this temporary misunderstanding, encouraging the more contemplative facets of your life to blossom. When the full moon shines through your sign on the 23rd, let its energy reflect your own heart's goals, guiding you forward in some long-cherished plan. Wrap your provocative Aries beauty in misty moon whites to add subtle flattery to your fiery charms. *Romantic days: 3, 8, 31.*

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Happiness lingers close to home, enjoying the changing October colors and fragrances with your best beloved, as Venus sheds her sultry persuasions on your romantic Taurus daydreams. Use these sunny interludes to offset the worrisome intrusion of an overbearing gentleman, a situation possibly connected with an angry, unexpected message. The wisdom of your own true love and your natural Taurus intuition will guide you toward protective byways, while the moon's waning light on the 25th helps you draw to a close those chapters of your life that are best marked finished. The soft October blues of late afternoon skies match your warm nature now. *Romantic days: 6, 11, 20.*

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

If your lover spellbinds you now, surrounding you with his enchantments like a shower of swirling golden leaves, let the sun energy shine through him to warm your autumn days, lingering happily close to home and romantic Venus's spell. If a more permanent relationship is overshadowed now by angry words or broken promises, a loving message from some other source could smooth away the sorrows, yet all-in-all, you must as ever rely on your intuitive Gemini mind to guide you toward your true destiny. A longer journey now could lead to undesired delays, so curb your wanderlust, add light yellow touches of October sunlight to your surroundings, and the 8th will begin a new surprise! *Romantic days: 3, 9, 22.*

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

The misty autumn grays and plum shades that flourish in the fashion world as well as in the October evening skies enhance your autumn mood, lending encouragement to new directions that beckon you on the 1st and 28th as the moon twice crosses your sign, drawing out your sensitive Cancer instincts. Certainly the time has arrived for seeking greater fortune if you remember that the sun now leaves its gold near your home and Venus luck shines through old and trusted relationships, and if you reserve some moments for solitude to renew your spirits. As though you had not quite enough to do, a charming, witty lover tumbles like a falling leaf, mesmerized by your Cancer warmth. *Romantic days: 2, 11, 29.*

LEO JULY 23-AUG. 22

Moon luck shines through your sign, lending its glowing enthusiasm to your exciting Leo personality after the 4th, opening pathways to greater fortune and perhaps, later in the month, pleasing you with words from a gentleman who is ever near-and-dear to your heart, no matter where he wanders. If you must make some puzzling choice that touches on your home or circles round a lover's quarrel, hold back your impetuous Leo spirit and tarry until time, the passing planets, and Mercury wisdom can guide you toward safer answers in November. While the moon's lingering light fills your October skies, wear its romantic silvery colors. *Romantic days: 3, 26, 31.*

VIRGO AUG. 23-SEPT. 22

Glamorous Venus graces your sign after the 5th, enhancing your clear Virgo beauty with all the smoky shades of October evenings. The planets confuse you now, their spells surrounding you like falling leaves in a whirlwind, sending you a message through someone you have perhaps chosen to forget such as an old love or a long-absent friend—or was he both? Only you can brush away the shadows, but whatever path you choose, avoid unhappy words with someone close to your home. Instead, linger in those pleasant pastimes that soothe your troubled spirit, renewing your thoughtful Virgo strengths, while the sun spins its magic to increase your fortune. *Romantic days: 6, 16, 28.*

that she nearly forgot the fact that all was not ended before Lawrence would be free to marry her. There still was the matter of the accusation of murder leveled against him.

The day after they had arrived back at Masterton Hall—much to the delight of Simon and with much catching up between Katherine and Janet—Dr. McLaren came to the house to inform Lawrence of the death of Barnabas the night before, in the hospital.

Katherine herself learned of it that evening after dinner. White-faced and trembling, he told her, while they sat in their chairs in the drawing room.

Katherine pondered the news. "But isn't it true that only Barnabas knew that you didn't actually kill Samantha? Wasn't it his word alone that could have saved you from this lengthy investigation into her death?"

He nodded. "Yes, my brother was the only one. But—" and he handed her an envelope, which she opened, slipping out the piece of paper which contained an unfamiliar script.

She noticed he was bemused, seemed to smile.

"He couldn't speak," Lawrence was saying, "but he was conscious," he reasserted, "and knew what he wanted to tell me. Read it, Kate . . . "

The handwriting, shaky, was scarcely discernible.

> *Forgive us both. Samantha devised the plot. She had to have Simon, you see, as well as me . . . knew you'd never relinquish your own son. We were to disappear, together—returning for Simon when you'd rejected him. Lawrence, the boy is* yours*—we were lovers, Samantha and I, but I could not sire a child—result of an old illness. Ask Dr. McLaren. Love the boy, Lawrence. Forgive . . .*

Then, at the bottom of the page, in failing handwriting, this:

> *This will be my testimony, Lawrence, that you are innocent of Samantha's death, that she died trying to steal and destroy your work, that she died despite your efforts to save her.*

The signature was weak but legible, and beneath it, in a firm, even hand, the signature of Dr. McLaren as witness.

She leapt to her feet the same instant he did, embracing him and controlling the tears that threatened to flood from her eyes.

"Lawrence, you're free—you're free!"

"Father?" The little voice came from the doorway, followed by Janet's. "Master Simon—don't disturb . . . you know better . . . "

But Lawrence, releasing Katherine, had already stepped to his son. Sweeping him up in his arms, much to the boy's surprised delight, not to mention Janet's confusion, he brought him into the room. Janet looked from the extraordinary spectacle to Katherine.

Katherine had allowed the joyful tears to stream down her cheeks. "Janet, there are going to be changes in this house, and this"—she nodded to father and son embracing—"is only the beginning."

Two years later similar words would be repeated in the same room. Master Simon, waiting in the drawing room with his father while his stepmother and Janet, the nurse and Dr. McLaren, remained upstairs, would be the first to hear the new baby's cries. "Well," the young man would say, "there are going to be some changes in this house—and that's only the beginning."

NEXT MONTH IN CAMEO

TWO GREAT NOVELS—

An epic of Americana

STRUGGLE FOR PARADISE

by Judi Breault

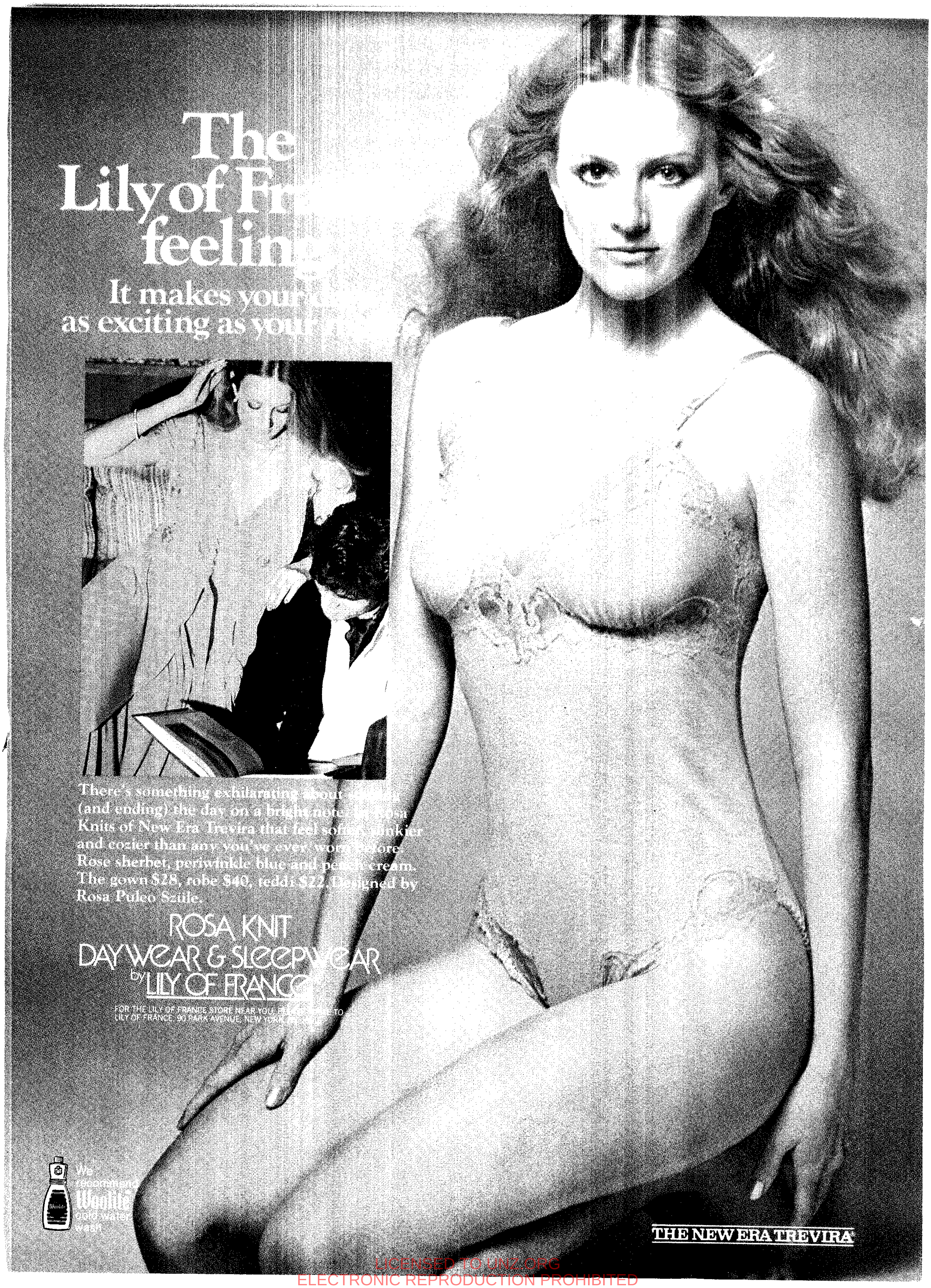
In the America of the 1870s, Sarah, a rebellious free-thinker, and Carlo, a courageous mining engineer, were both pioneers; fatally attracted to one another, their spirits were, in the words of the Indian legend, "full of turmoil, and their capacity for love and hate so great that they were afraid to ignite the spark that could destroy or fulfill"

A contemporary English romance

THE WINTER PRINCE

by Maria Clissold

She thought of them—Anna with her silvery blonde hair and Simon, tall, dark and aristocratic—as Princess and Prince and she willed her beloved Vine Cottage to Anna knowing that, in time, it would reveal the truth that would set Simon free



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